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1ST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

LOUIS L'AMOUR™

WESTERN MAGAZINE

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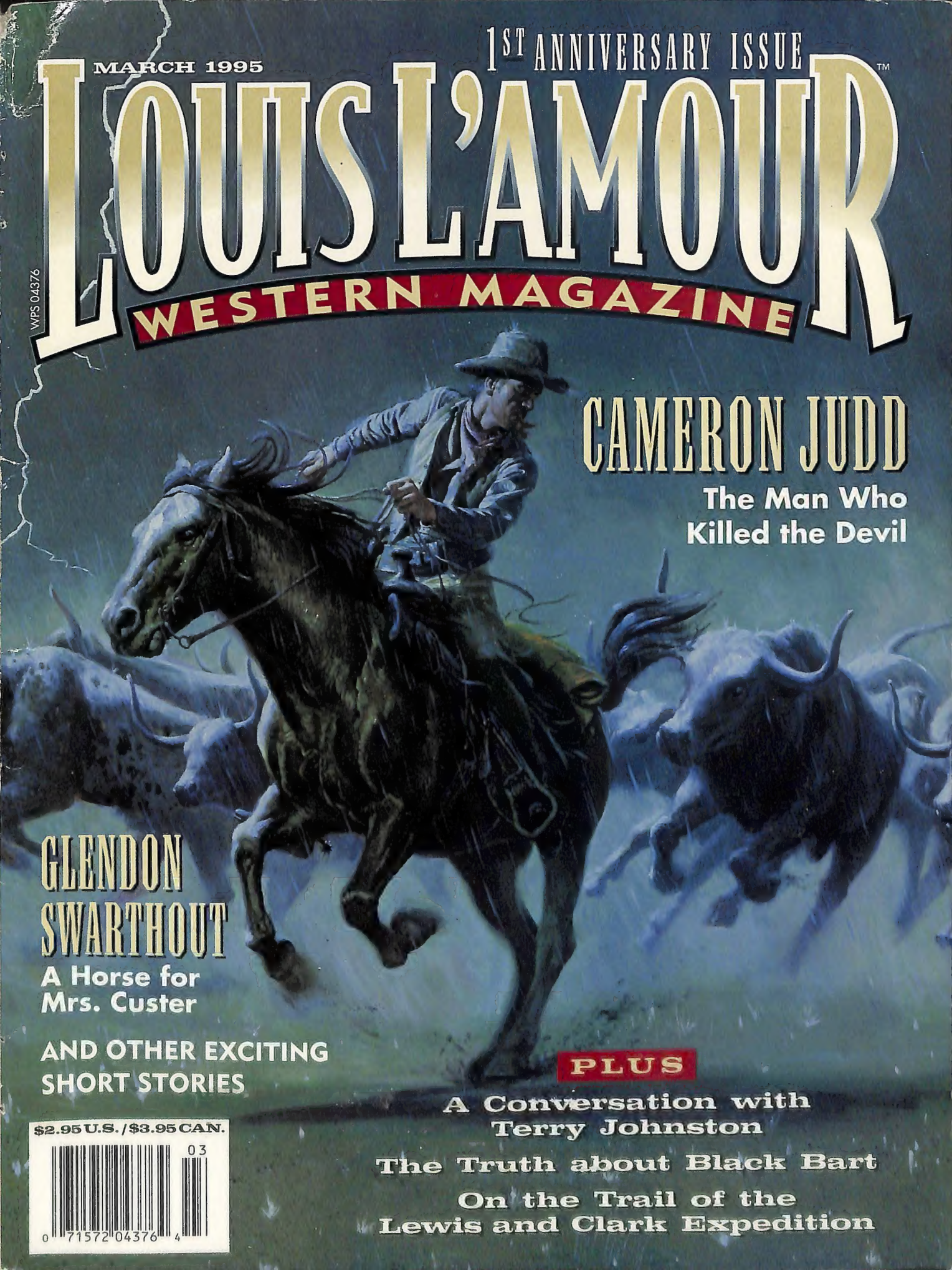

CAMERON JUDD

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GLENDON SWARTHOUT

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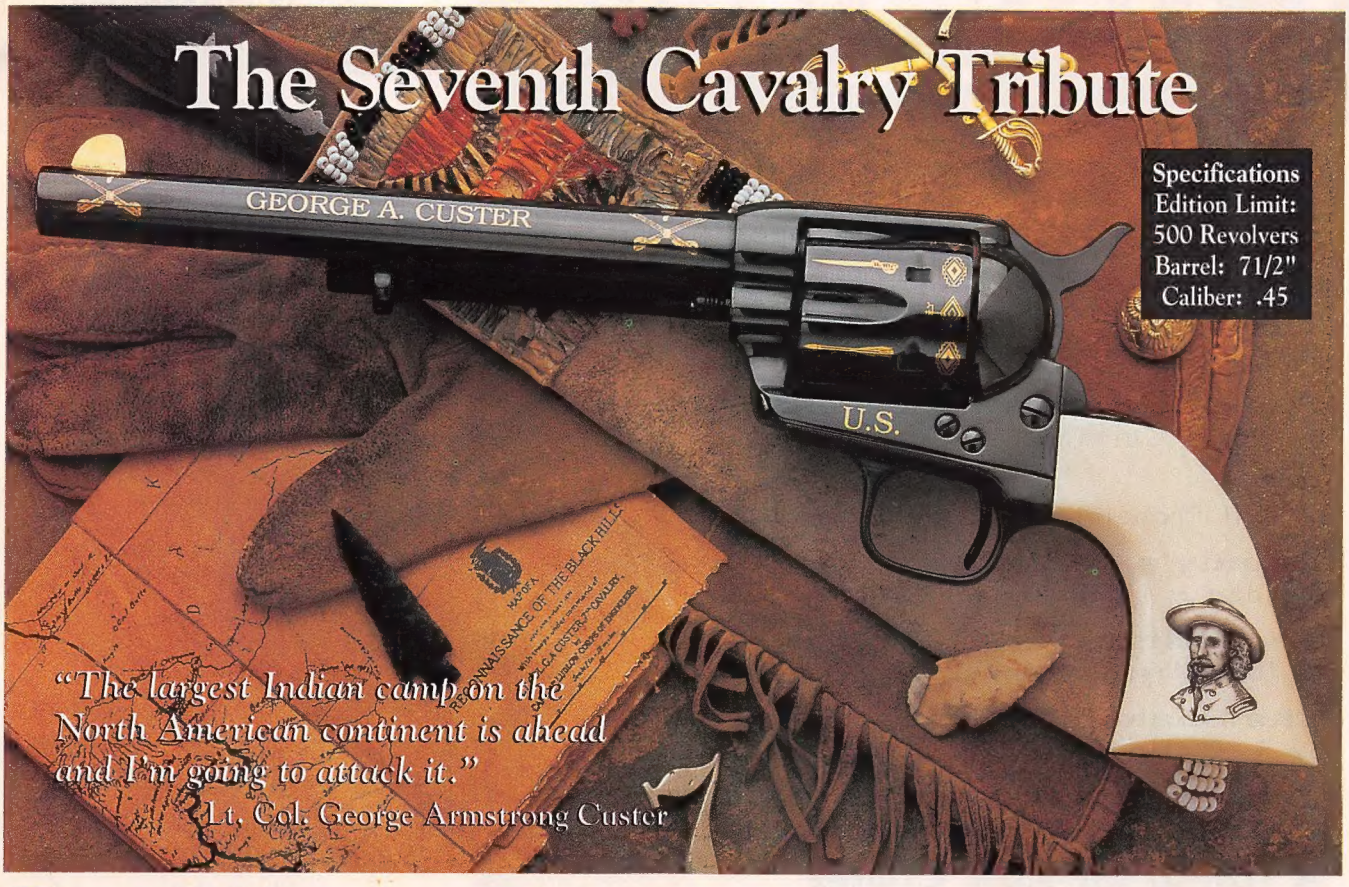
GEORGE A. CUSTER
U.S.
"The largest Indian camp on the North American continent is ahead and I'm going to attack it."
Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer

Specifications
Edition Limit: 500 Revolvers
Barrel: 71/2"
Caliber: .45

Little Big Horn. Sitting Bull. Crazy Horse. Custer. After more than a century, the names still stir our emotions. Like Gettysburg and Bull Run, the Little Big Horn is a battle burned into the American consciousness, a brief moment in time preserved forever in history.

Now, America Remembers memorializes this event with the Seventh Cavalry Tribute, a faithful reproduction of the classic Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army Revolver carried by Custer's cavalrymen.

The Classic Single-Action Army .45

In Custer's day, it was said the Cavalry could travel forty miles a day on beans and hay. What was needed was a sidearm every bit as hardy and dependable as the soldiers themselves.

The U.S. Cavalry's Board of Officers decided they had found exactly that in the Colt Single-Action Army Model 1873. Praised for its superiority in "efficiency, safety, simplicity and lightness," this .45 caliber revolver became an indispensable tool for the Cavalry.

Honoring the Fighting Seventh

With the Seventh Cavalry Tribute, the classic Single-Action Army lives again. On both sides of the barrel, 24-karat gold crossed sabres and the number "7" signify the Seventh Cavalry.

A combination of Cavalry and Indian symbols adorn the cylinder. A diamond-shaped pattern is from an original Sioux saddlebag. Sabres and arrows symbolize the two armies who fought. On each side of the frame, the inscription "U.S."recreates the markings present on all government issued Colts in this era.

The final element is a pair of faux ivory grips, laser-etched in amazing detail. On the right is the crossed sabres logo of the Seventh Cavalry. On the left is a detailed portrait of George A. Custer, dashingly attired in his Army jacket and broad brim hat.

A Display of Valor

A firearm as remarkable as the Seventh Cavalry Tribute deserves a special showcase. We have designed a special walnut presentation case. The top bears a laser-etched portrait of Custer with the Seventh Cavalry symbol. Each case features a brass plaque inscription, and a U.S. Army Sword Plate Buckle just like the one worn by Custer.

Remember the Fighting Seventh

By the banks of the Little Big Horn River, the spectacular career of George Armstrong Custer ended. Historians may debate the whys and wherefores of the battle, but it will forever be remembered as a milestone in American history.

For the men of the Seventh Cavalry, it was the ultimate test of courage. For the American Indians, it was one last great victory. About the Cavalry at Little Big Horn, in later years Sitting Bull said,"I tell no lies about dead men. These men who came with the "Long Hair" were as good men as ever fought." Brave Wolf said, "It was hard fighting; very hard all the time. I have been in many hard fights, but I never saw such brave men." The Seventh Cavalry Tribute is a fitting, lasting memorial to that unforgettable battle and to the proud warriors who fought on both sides.

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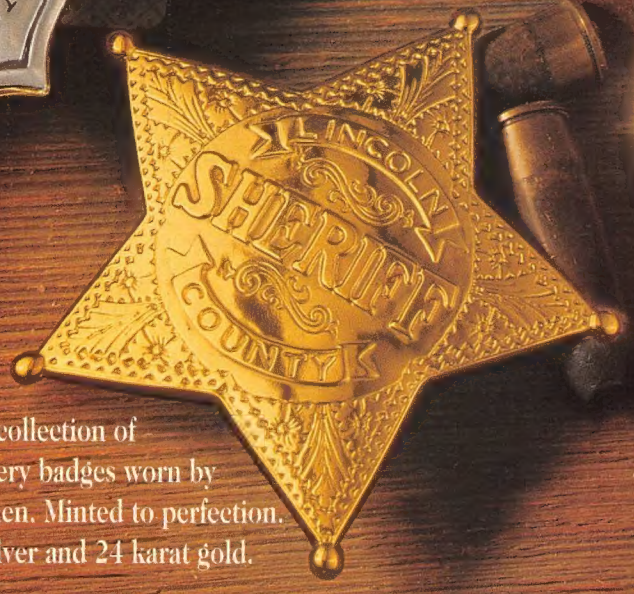

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The Official Badges of the Great Western Lawmen

BY ELANA LORE

If our Classic Western this issue–"A Horse for Mrs. Custer," by Glendon Swarthout–seems familiar to you, it may be because you have seen the movie that was made from it. The 1956 film, *Seventh Cavalry,* is frequently shown on television. Several of Swarthout's books were made into films, as well. They include *The Shootist,* which was John Wayne's last film, and *They Came to Cordura,* which starred Gary Cooper. A commemorative twenty-fifth anniversary edition of Swarthout's best-known book, *Bless the Beasts & Children,* is being released in March in paperback by Pocket Books.

A note for historians: Miles Swarthout, Glendon's son, says that over the course of the years since this story was originally published, his father, who is now deceased, received many inquiries from people who wanted to obtain a copy of *Dakota Days,* the book mentioned as the source of the background for this story. The book does not exist.

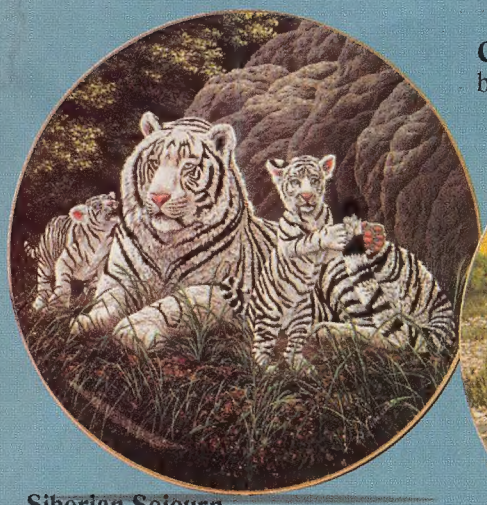
It is difficult to believe, but "The Man Who Killed the Devil" is Cameron Judd's first published western short story. He has written twenty-two western and frontier-themed historical novels–twenty already published and two about to be released by Bantam Books. His most recent one, *Crockett of Tennessee,* published by Bantam in 1994, is based on the life and times of Davy Crockett, who was born only a few miles from where Judd now lives.

David Curran, author of "The Truth About the Wild Love," has perhaps the most unusual background of our authors in this issue. He is an expert on American ginseng farming and ghosts, and has written books on both subjects, including *The Complete Ginseng Grower's Manual* and *True Hauntings in Montana.* He says his first big sale was a story he wrote with a friend for the television series *Wiseguys.* The episode, called "People Do It All the Time," was first aired in November 1989.

R. C. House, who wrote "The Snakebite Cure" for this issue, is also the author of *The Official Price Guide to Old West Collectibles,* published by Random House in 1994. Several western writers have also told me that they rely on him for expert information on firearms for their stories. He has had an unusual honor bestowed on him–an asteroid discovered in 1988 was named after him by its discoverer, JPL astronomer Eleanor Helin. It's called 4950 House.

Tim Champlin, author of "Standoff at Tinajas Altas," retired this past May from his day job–as a supervisor of eight to ten benefits counselors for the Veterans Administration in Nashville, Tennessee. He and his staff answered about a thousand calls a day on the VA toll-free telephone line. That's a lot of talking! He has a novel called *The Survivor* coming out from a new publisher, Circle V Books, sometime later this year.

We hope you enjoy this issue.



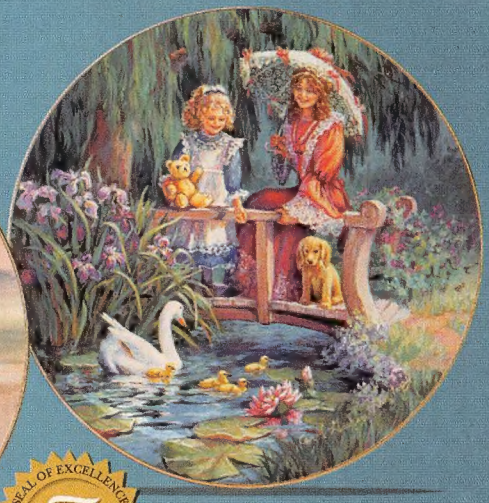
Siberian Sojourn
by R.G. Finney

Cool Water
by R.G. Finney

Dining Out
by Chuck Ripper

Man of Peace
by Chris Calle

Taking Wing
by Don Balke



Reflections
by Carol Graham-Armstrong

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Caswell McCarthy was no hero. The very idea of such a thing had never crossed his mind. Yet he had cheated to give himself the short straw when the five exhausted men had drawn to see who would stay behind. To him, it was strictly a practical matter. He was the only one who had the slightest chance of slowing down the pursuing war party of Chiricahua Apaches.

It mattered not that he was the oldest of the group of gold hunters by at least ten years. At fifty, his scarred body was still lean and hard, his reflexes quick. Only his eyesight was not as keen as it once was.

He had stung the pursuers early by wounding the lone scout who had come creeping forward to check the water hole for danger. With the crack of the shot that downed the scout, the five other Apaches he had seen leading their horses across the desert had simply faded into the dun-colored landscape.

That was four hours ago, and the situation had settled into a standoff. He shifted his position and pressed his back against the smooth boulder, feeling the warmth of the rock through his thin cotton shirt. The smothering heat of late afternoon hung oppressively

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON DOWD

by Tim Champlin

STANDOFF
AT
TINAJAS
ALTAS

Cas was gambling that the Apaches would not abandon their horses and bypass the water, especially with one of them wounded.

over the jumbled rocks of the Tinajas Altas Mountains. They were a few miles north of Mexico and a long way from anywhere else.

He wondered if he had done the right thing by simply wounding the scout in the leg instead of killing him outright. All five of the Indians he had seen were armed with carbines and he dared not let them get too close, if he was to stall them from reaching the water. It was the water they had to have if they were to continue pursuing the party of prospectors. Water for their animals, if not for themselves. Cas was gambling the Apaches would not simply abandon their horses, bypass the water, and go on afoot, especially with one of their number wounded. No, they let nothing go unavenged. They would stay and finish him.

At least he would not be tormented by thirst while he awaited his inevitable end. That fact was assured by the rock tank below him—a natural hollow worn in the granite by the scouring of rain and wind and sand over centuries of time. Just now it was brimming with rainwater from a rare recent cloudburst. Several sun-blasted days from now the precious fluid would be shrunk from its present width of several yards to a glutinous puddle of water and animal urine, algae-covered and alive with wigglers—a nauseating mixture barely capable of sustaining life. But he wouldn't be at this stone tank days from now. In fact, he might not be here hours from now. The wily native hunters would probably see to that.

He slipped the straps of the two full canteens from his shoulder and set them on the ground. Gripping his carbine in his left hand, he bent his hat brim against the westering sun and carefully scanned the area within a hundred yards of the tank, noting every rock and clump of mesquite. He wished he had a pair of field glasses to sharpen his focus. He saw nothing; he would have been surprised if he had. Yet he knew they were out there, somewhere. Since the wounding of the scout, they had been cautious. He had seen only a couple of slight movements earlier as they had changed positions, moving in toward the jumble of rocks. Likely he would not see or hear them again until a bullet or a knife found him. They were masters of stalking. How many generations had these people lived in this unforgiving desert country? They had certainly been shaped by it—tough, patient, enduring, and as cunning as the nocturnal hunters of the animal kingdom. Even their physical appearance had adapted. As a rule, the full-grown Apache male was not over five feet eight inches, with a deep chest and thin, sinewy arms and legs. They were trained from childhood to inure themselves to pain, hunger, and thirst. At an energy-saving, ground-eating lope, one could cover sixty miles in a day in his knee-high desert moccasins and be none the worse for it at the end.

But they had to have *some* water. In spite of rumors to the contrary, they were not superhuman when it came to surviving in the desert. Granted, they could live off the land and even thrive on what would kill a white man. But they, nonetheless, had to have moisture. Even now they were probably chewing the pulp of some barrel cactus, their black eyes glittering with hate for the white man who denied the access to the water tank—a white man they had been pursuing for miles, and who had shot one of them from ambush.

Gripping his Winchester, he slid back between the huge boulders and looked for a more secure place to keep his vigil—someplace where he would not have to watch his back until darkness fell. He was already tired from the chase in the heat, the strain, and the waiting. Once night came, he didn't know how he would be able to stay awake to watch the tank. But every hour he could prevent his pursuers from reaching water was one more hour that his companions would be putting distance between themselves and these Apaches. By the time he gave up his life, maybe his friends would have too great a lead to be caught, walking southeast on the *Camino del Diablo*—the Devil's Highway—leading their jaded horses, but loaded with all the water they could drink and had containers for. He was determined to give them the chance to make it to the next water, at least a day or more away.

He catfooted away from the tank and worked his way to higher ground, making sure not to expose himself above the rocks. He settled beneath a bush, watching, listening, all of his senses alert.

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The shadows of the shrubs on the flat desert below slowly stretched out longer and longer. Finally, the orange ball of the sun rested on the horizon and a distant range of low, arid mountains took on a glowing rose tint. When darkness fell, he would change his position again.

A shot broke the stillness and a slug zipped through the bush just above his head. Cas saw the puff of smoke, but held his fire. The Apache was well hidden and was apparently just wanting to keep him on edge, or to flush him out for a clear shot. If he stayed silent and hidden long enough, maybe they would think he had been hit. In all his years on the frontier, he had never known Apaches to attack at night. Coincidence or superstition—he didn't know which. But he couldn't stake his life on them coming for him only in the light.

He took a deep breath, knowing it would be a long, sleepless night. If only he had someone to spell him, to trade watches with. But as long as he was wishing for the impossible, why not wish to be safely away from here? He shoved the thought from his mind and turned back to scanning the area around the tank. He didn't know how many of them were out there—probably no more than six, counting the wounded scout. They could make short work of him any time they wanted. But Apaches made no frontal assaults on defended positions. They were taught from childhood to be cautious—to inflict hurt on an enemy while taking the least possible risk. They saw no shame in running away to fight another day, if the odds did not favor immediate victory. Their savage cunning was totally different from the white man's code of honor or bravery. Their numbers were too few to sacrifice even one warrior unnecessarily. He had already gotten one of them, and very likely they wouldn't chance further injury to get at him. He was a sidewinder, or at least a scorpion, to them. But they had to deal with him. They couldn't simply bypass the water hole and continue their pursuit of McCarthy's party. The Apaches would need to fill their long, hollow horse-gut canteens with water.

The sluggish heat of day still hung in the windless air over the isolated drama. Cas took his sweat-slick hands off his carbine, one at a time, and wiped them on his pants legs. He drew a deep breath and watched as the rosy mountain range faded to dark gray and the sky silently lit up in a blaze of red and gold, casting a strange, postsunset light over the landscape. He allowed himself to ponder this grand panorama of nature for several long minutes. A sense of wonder began to steal over him, displacing the fear and tension. His perilous situation gradually evaporated from his conscious thoughts like a puddle in the desert sun. Allowing his gaze to drift over the desert, the mountains and the sky, he felt an awed sense of his own smallness. He was only a speck in the vast, arid distances. The rhythms of impersonal nature rolled on and on, day after day, through cycles of the moon and seasons of the year, oblivious to the antics of insignificant humans who scrabbled about the surface of the planet, killing one another. Individuals didn't matter. Nature, in her abundance, would produce more so the species would survive. The realization caused Caswell McCarthy to feel a terrible pang of loneliness. He closed his eyes and bowed his head on the breech of his carbine. Never could he remember being so alone, so vulnerable.

He sighed deeply. If he only had someone human to talk to, to share his feelings with. His foes, lying concealed in the desert out there, hardly seemed human at all. They were even worse than implacable nature—they had intellects and wills that were bent on taking his life. He was even denied the company of his mule, who had been killed by a ricocheting slug. Not only would his mule have provided company, but it could have alerted him to any approaching danger. So overpowering was this sense of loneliness that it became a terrible fear, and finally wrenched a muffled groan from his lips.

"God, help!"

It was not an ejaculation of despair; it was a desperate prayer. He paused, surprised at his own words. As a child, he had been taught to believe in a personal God, but for years he had hardly given the concept a thought. Was there really a God who knew, or cared, about the problems of Caswell McCarthy? He hardly dared

The Apaches saw no shame in running away to fight another day, if the odds did not favor immediate victory.

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hope. Apparently the belief was still there, buried somewhere deep within him. He wanted to believe, and the thought somehow comforted him. With this came a calmness as he looked around at boulders, granite tank, the mesquite bushes with the birds flitting through them. It was as if he were seeing them for the first time, instead of the last. From the tiniest insects to the vultures soaring on silent thermals high overhead, the eternal cycles of predator and prey continued, mostly out of his sight. Yet, in spite of the cruelty of a harsh nature, the world was a beautiful place, and he would hate to leave it.

A whisper of sound from behind gave his subconscious the warning he needed. He rolled to his back just in time to take the shock of a dark form crashing through the foliage. The Winchester he thrust up with both hands deflected the blow from a descending knife. Cas instinctively brought up both knees and rolled back hard onto his shoulders. His Apache attacker was cushioned by the compressed mesquite branches, and McCarthy's quick, springing action flipped the Indian over his head. The Apache landed on his feet, but slipped on the loose dirt and rocks of the downward slope. The second or two it took to regain his feet and turn allowed Cas just enough time to roll onto his stomach and cock the carbine. As the Indian lunged upward, Cas jerked the trigger. The rifle exploded. The Apache crumpled with a grunt, his wiry, breechclouted form rolling loosely down the incline until it slid to a stop at the base of a boulder, the long, black hair covering his face.

McCarthy sprang away, his heart pounding. A rifle cracked and the bullet whined off a boulder just behind him. He faded into a thick clump of mesquite, then wormed his way between two cabin-sized boulders until he could see the flat surface of the water in the stone tank again. He was certain he had made almost no sound as he stopped to listen for signs of pursuit. All he could hear was his own harsh breathing and his heart pounding in his ears. Were they coming after him one at a time? Well, he had put two of them out of action.

As Cas neared the spot where the burrowing owl had vanished, he heard a buzzing, rasping noise like the sound of a rattlesnake.

He guessed there were at least four more. The odds were still four to one. And they were armed with rifles.

His breathing and heart rate slowly subsided as he remained motionless.

A few minutes later, as he was staring at the slate-colored water that was reflecting the last of the sky's light, a movement caught the corner of his vision. He jerked around, carbine ready, but it was only a small animal stirring several yards above the tank. Cas let out a sigh of relief as he strained to see what it was in the dying light. A kangaroo rat, perhaps? No. It was some kind of bird, and a good-sized one at that. He shifted his position and moved a few cautious steps toward it to get a better look. Instead of flying, the bird stretched taller and then began a series of bobbing, bowing movements, nearly touching the ground with its breast. At the same time, it emitted a chattering, chucking call.

"Well, I'll be a suck-egg mule —a burrowing owl!" Cas laughed to himself as he recognized the comical appearance of the wide, round eyes and the formal bowing motion.

Cas took a step closer. Instead of flying, the owl disappeared into a hole in the ground. Cas couldn't resist a closer look. Taking a chance of exposing himself, he dropped to the ground and bellied forward, feeling the deepening dusk would cover him. As he neared the spot where the burrowing owl had vanished, he heard a buzzing, rasping sound. He paused, startled, until he remembered that this desperate mimicking of the rattlesnake was unique to the burrowing owl when it was cornered.

He grinned as he squirmed his way back into the rocks. He leaned back against a boulder, cradling his Winchester and idly pondered the strangeness of a bird that would live and hatch its young in empty prairie dog burrows and abandoned snake dens. He wondered why this owl wasn't more susceptible to predators than other birds. Coyotes would surely have a good chance at them.

As he pondered the owl, the seed of an idea sprouted in his mind and began to grow. The more he examined it, the more the idea appealed to him. At best, it was a desperate long shot, he had to admit. But it was better than

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If the Indians were going to come for Cas, it would probably be as soon as there was enough light to see well.

no shot at all. He decided to try it; he had nothing to lose.

All his senses alert, he moved away from his position and circled around to where the body of his mule lay. The premoon night had fallen black, and he had to feel his way more than see it. He fumbled in the saddlebags and found what he was looking for—a small ball of twine. With infinite care, he worked his way back to a vantage point between the rocks. He was sure the Apaches probably heard him moving and scuffing about in the rocks, but no attack was forthcoming. Nevertheless, he was breathing hard with tension and exertion when he again settled between the boulders. The only sign of the pool below him now was the faint reflection of a few stars on the unruffled surface. There was not a breath of wind and the scurryings of several small nocturnal desert hunters was the only sound breaking the stillness.

He uncapped one of the canteens and soaked the ball of twine to limber up the kinks when he unrolled it. He fashioned a loose slipknot in one end of the twine. Then, taking it and his carbine, he stole silently down toward the tank. He wished for some light, but knew this job he dared not attempt after moonrise. When he was about where he had seen the owl, he went to all fours and felt for the burrow. One hand finally encountered it in the soft earth, within three feet of a nearly vertical slab of rock. Forming the slipknotted loop around the rim of the hole he unrolled the twine, playing it out as he backed away. It was just long enough to reach his lookout point between the boulders. There he settled in once more, holding the end of the twine. He didn't know if the owl, or owls, were out hunting, or were in their burrow. He knew they hunted during both light and darkness.

He gripped the carbine and the twine and slipped to a sitting position against the boulder, facing the tank.

Time crept by on leaden boots. The sooty blackness, the quiet, and his fatigue combined to drag his eyelids down. He fought to stay alert, but time and again he found his consciousness fading. He changed positions, pressed the cool metal of the rifle against his forehead; then he sat bolt upright, so that his head would fall over and wake him when he dozed.

His eyes flew open and he saw that the moon was high in the sky. With a start he realized he had been asleep for some time. He had gotten away with it. But had his enemies crept closer while he was unconscious? Had the owls entered or left their burrow while he slept? He cursed himself silently for his weakness. But it was done and he had gotten at least some rest, and escaped with his life.

The moon, in the clear night sky, bathed the landscape in a silvery hue, etching black shadows. Cas rubbed his eyes and resumed his vigil, trying to distinguish shapes in the strange light. Bushes appeared to move; shadows became creeping Apaches. When this happened, he used the trick of looking away and then back. All was still and quiet.

Something clicked against stone only a few yards away and he brought the rifle up, his heart pounding. A shape moved cautiously out of the brush near the tank. Cas brought the carbine to his shoulder, holding his breath. But then the moonlight revealed the head and neck of a mule deer as it bent to drink.

He lowered the rifle. At least he was wide awake now. The night dragged on. The moon gradually declined and finally disappeared. McCarthy suffered the agony of drowsiness again. It was apparent that the Apaches were not going to attack at night. Or maybe they had bypassed the tank to continue their pursuit. He dismissed this thought immediately. They were still close, and he had better not get careless. He felt as if he had been drugged as he fought to keep his eyes open.

Finally, in a period of wakefulness, he noticed that he could distinguish the shapes of the boulders around him as a gray light began to filter up from the east. Just at that moment, one of the burrowing owls popped its head out of the ground. Cas tensed. After a few moments, the feathered body moved and Cas snatched the twine. He caught the bird by one leg as it popped out of its burrow. The owl gave several sharp clacking, chattering noises as the snare yanked it, flapping, to the ground. He quickly secured the end of the twine to a small creosote bush near his feet.

Now it was just a matter of waiting and hoping the Apaches found the captive owl before some

predator did. If the Indians were going to come for him, it would probably be as soon as there was enough light to see well. If his ruse didn't work, he was determined not to be taken alive. He had seen, firsthand, the results of Apache torture of a captive. He would not commit suicide, but if it came to a hopeless situation he would make a run for it, and force them to shoot him. But then, maybe they would just kill him quickly, take what water they wanted, and go on after McCarthy's party.

The light grew, minute by minute, until Cas could see the burrowing owl clearly. It was a light brown bird, mottled with white spots, about nine inches long. The slipknot in the twine had snagged the loop firmly around one leg. The bird made a couple of attempts to retreat into its burrow, but the line was too short.

Cas squinted toward the east as the first shafts of sunlight stabbed at his gritty eyes. The temperature had probably not dropped below eighty overnight. He was already sweating. But the heat was not the only reason. He felt the presence of Apaches. They were somewhere very close—he was sure of it.

While he had fought, unsuccessfully, to stay alert all night, they had probably taken advantage of the darkness to close the circle around the tank and around him, even though they probably didn't know exactly where he was.

The owl was bobbing and jerking at the end of the twine, making angry, chattering noises.

Cas slid away from between the two boulders and edged his way carefully toward the east, out of the jumble of rocks around the tank. He had delayed the Apaches long enough to give his companions about a sixteen-hour head start. Every few seconds he paused, listened, and looked intently. Three birds flew up from the brush a few yards away. He cocked the carbine, holding his breath and listening. Nothing.

Just as he moved again, a shot blasted the stillness and something solid hit him in the right side, throwing him off his feet into a mesquite bush. He reflexively squeezed the trigger and his carbine fired a wild shot into the ground. In spite of his numbing pain he rolled over, struggling to work the lever for another shot. Two brown figures with long black hair were leaping over the rocks toward him. He fired without aiming. One spun away, clutching his arm, and dropped his rifle. Cas rolled away as the other Apache fired and missed, the bullet kicking up dirt less than a foot away. Cas jerked the lever and fired again, but missed the Indian, who ducked back and down.

Cas crawled desperately into the partial cover of some scattered rocks, tearing his knees and elbows as he went. There was a burning sensation in his right side and he felt a wetness soaking his clothing. He ignored the pain that felt as if someone had hit him with a club and squirmed to a crouch, his Winchester ready, looking quickly for other attackers. There were none. He knew he had been hit and he was breathing heavily, his heart pounding and his mouth dry. If this was the end, he meant to make a desperate fight of it. He would not go easily, and he would not be captured.

He heard a shout from the other side of the boulders, in the direction of the tank. It was not a cry of rage. Cas understood only a few of the words of the Apache dialect, but enough to know that the Indians had found the owl. Then he saw the nearby Apaches leap out and scramble away toward the water. There was more excited talk from behind the boulders.

Cas felt safe enough for a few moments to examine his injuries. With a sigh of relief he saw that the shot had burst one of the canteens hanging from his shoulder. The bullet had been slowed and deflected by the full canteen, and had cut a shallow groove along the muscles of his side, just above the belt. The wetness he had felt was mostly water, rather than the small amount of blood from the wound.

Cas rose from his crouch, dropped the ruined canteen, and ran a few steps. He paused to look and listen, ignoring the scrapes and bruises and the stinging sensation in his side.

They had apparently given up pursuing him, but they were making no effort at concealment now as he heard at least two excited voices. Then one was raised in what sounded like a strident command, although Cas could not pick up any words from this dis-

A long fifteen or twenty minutes passed during which Cas saw and heard nothing. Then the sound of hoofbeats came to his ears.

tance. The voices grew quieter, and Cas cautiously moved to the south and east, away from the tank. He dared not retreat into the open desert but stopped just short of it, staying in the cover of the rocks and waiting for whatever might come. A long fifteen or twenty minutes passed during which he saw and heard nothing. Then the sound of hoofbeats came to his ears.

Cas crept up from concealment. The sounds were receding. He scrambled, slipping and sliding, up the slick, bare rocks to get a look. Five riders were galloping west, leading a riderless horse. From the way they rode, he guessed at least two of the horsemen were wounded. They were not going after McCarthy's party; they were going back the way they had come.

Cas carefully crept back down toward the tank. It was deserted. He breathed a prayer of thanks. As he suspected, they had had enough. No one was there to ambush him. The remaining members of the war party had apparently taken what water they needed for themselves and their horses and left. And, also as he expected, the twine had been slashed and the burrowing owl was gone.

It was not his prowess as a fighter they had run from. It was their fear of owls as embodied spirits of their ancestors and dead relatives that had saved him.

"Thanks, old friend," he saluted the absent owl. "I doubt you were toting any spirit besides your own, but you sure helped me keep mine inside this old skin for a little longer."

He scrubbed a callused hand over the stubble on his face. "Reckon they thought you were flyin' the soul of that warrior I shot last night to the spirit world? Well, whatever they believe, it scared hell outta them and they left."

The sting in his side asserted itself and he slipped out of his shirt. "Lucky," he muttered, twisting around to view the raw, oozing path of the bullet, "I was movin'." Where the canteen had slammed into him, the flesh was already starting to discolor into what would be a very sore bruise.

He buttoned the shirt back on and went to find the other blanket-sided canteen he had dropped. He drank his fill of the gamey-tasting liquid. Back at the tank, he rinsed his bandanna and strained water into the container. Pulling off his boots and gun belt, he eased his body into the tank, where he soaked and rinsed away the accumulated dirt and sweat from himself and his clothes as best he could, while luxuriating in the relatively clean, cool water.

After ten minutes he climbed out, refreshed. He pulled his boots on his bare, wet feet and buckled the gun belt back in place. He would set off from the tank, walking east. His friends would not be expecting him, so they would not be waiting, but he hoped to catch up to them eventually—maybe in a day or two, if they had paused at the Tule Wells. They had taken all the food. By traveling easily and mostly at night, he thought he had the strength to make it. After all, he smiled to himself, a man his age didn't burn up the fuel that a younger man would need.

He looked around for his lost hat. It was going to be a hot day.

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Tuttle Sanders, chief and only deputy in the town marshal's office in Willow Creek, Kansas, leaned back in his chair in the Laura Belle Cafe and scratched at his beard like he always did before saying something wise and deep. "You know, Joe," he said, gazing wistfully past his companion and across the room, "it always did make me hungry to watch a fat man eat."

The Man Who Killed the Devil

by Cameron Judd

It was a Tuesday, about eight o'clock, the day and time Tut Sanders and Joe Alder always sat down to breakfast together at the Laura Belle. Alder set aside his coffee cup and leaned closer, unsure he had heard Sanders right.

"What'd you just say?"

"I said, it always did make me hungry to see a fat man eat. A fat man eats with such...such *relish*, you know."

Alder was incredulous. "Tut, you're telling me that watching a fat man slop himself actually gives you an appetite?"

Sanders frowned. "You find something wrong with that?"

"It's the most tomfool thing I've ever heard you say, that's all."

"That right, Marshal?" Sanders called Alder by his title only when he was growing riled at him. "Well, then, sneak yourself a look at that man yonder in the corner, then tell me truthful if you don't catch a yen for flapjacks. Go on. Do it."

Just to play along, Alder deliberately dropped his checked napkin and looked in the indicated direction as he leaned to retrieve it. At the corner table sat a monstrously huge man in a black suit, forking hunks of sorghum-drenched flapjacks into a cavernous mouth. What he accommodated in one bite would have made three for the average man. When he chewed, little dribbles of molasses squeezed out over his lips to be recaptured with the flick of a wide tongue. He looked utterly contented, even though he so outsized his suit that he surely must have been uncomfortable in it, his bulk straining out in pouches wherever his stretched garments would allow it.

He was a sight worth seeing, but what caught Alder's attention even more was the auburn-haired woman seated across from the big man. It wasn't because she was pretty, for the fact was that she was plain and small-shouldered and meek-looking. She was eating with birdlike delicacy made all the more noticeable in contrast with her tablemate's crude swilling. His wife, or maybe a daughter? She looked young enough to be the latter, for he was sixty or so—but then she shifted position and Alder saw that she was pregnant—at least six or seven months along. She had a terribly sad manner about her and a sorrowful expression that was so fixed it was evident she had worn it a long time.

Alder sat back up and retucked his napkin under his collar. "Tut, that man's putting on the most purely disgusting show I've ever seen. How that could make you hungry is beyond me."

When the fat man chewed, little dribbles of molasses squeezed out over his lips to be recaptured with the flick of a wide tongue.

"Well, it does," the other mumbled in a tone that said the subject should now be dropped. Alder fought back a grin as Sanders sat grumpy and silent a few moments, but then their food arrived and brightened the deputy's humor. Alder tucked Sanders's comment about the fat man away in his mind with scores of other "Tutisms" his companion had come up with over the years.

Alder carved up his hard-fried eggs, mixed them with his hash browns, and began eating. The two men dined for a time without talking. Alder couldn't stop thinking about the forlorn expression of the young woman. At length he said, "Tut, take a glance and tell me if that gal looks as sad as she did a few minutes ago."

Sanders peered past Alder, squinting, and said, "She does. Why you asking?"

"Don't know. Just noticed her manner. You ever seen either of them about town before? I ain't."

"Me, neither."

"I reckon they must be here for the camp meeting."

Sanders grunted unhappily. The campground revival meeting, going on now for two weeks in a big meadow just west of town, was a sore topic for him. Though the series of nightly services was proving a boon for east Kansas religion and Willow Creek commerce, it was a bane for tavernkeepers, gamblers, and guilt-ridden sinners such as Tut Sanders, who despised the fierce preaching, the vivid descriptions of hell's eternal torments, the pleas to turn away from every vice he held dear. Despite his feelings, Sanders's job as deputy had required him to be on hand for half the camp meeting services, with Alder covering the other half. The presence of law was important. With several hundred people living together in close, uncomfortable quarters for days on end, growing weary and cramped and emotional under nightly bombardments of fire and brimstone sermons, there was always the potential for more than revival to break out. There had already been one shoving match—boys arguing over a girl—and a fistfight between two men who had taken opposite sides in the war some twenty years ago and still nursed old angers.

Sanders muttered, "Dang-blasted camp meeting squalling—seems it's been going on an eternity. Singing and harping and praying and meddling in everybody's life. I don't know how much longer I can stand it. You know what it is keeping it going, don't you, Joe? It's the women. They get all swoonish and pitterpat-hearted over that pretty-faced preacher, and then their men got to come out with them to meeting, night after night, so as not to see their women stole away by him. That's what it is, Joe!"

"You're a cynical man, Tut. That preacher ain't after nobody's woman. And tonight's my turn to go to meeting, anyhow, so you're off the hook till tomorrow evening. Now, let's finish up these victuals and make us a round before work."

They cleaned off their meal and, as always, Alder paid the bill. Sanders was compensated very little for being deputy. He made his meager living primarily as a

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stableman at the livery, which, like every other enterprise in Willow Creek, was a busy place these days because of the camp meeting. The little town's population had swollen considerably, if temporarily. Folks had come in from a hundred miles around, living in wagons and tents on the campground itself, or in some cases taking up rooms in Willow Creek. It was all rather exciting, especially to Willow Creek's population of dogs, children, and old folks—three groups that always love big goings-on.

At the heart of the excitement was the handsome young preacher named Charles Craig, originally from Louisville, Kentucky, now a full-time traveling evangelist. He had a musical speaking style that would drift into a dark chant, and when he got to going full steam there was a flash and furiousness about him that kept even children's attention. He had a gift, no doubt about it; rumor was that the preachers of the local congregations were jealous and trying to mimic his style.

Alder and Sanders made a jaunt about Willow Creek, mostly just saying hello to folks and making themselves and their badges seen, so that strangers would be reminded there was law in the town. Then Sanders headed off to the livery and Alder to the big Willow Creek General Mercantile store, which his father had founded when the town was new and passed down to his only son when he had died. When Alder walked in through the squeaking front double door, still thinking about the sad-eyed pregnant woman in the cafe, his wife Sally had already opened shop and was handing a bottle of Brendle's Epicural Salve to a slender young man it took Alder a couple of moments to recognize. It was the preacher, Charles Craig. The only reason Alder hadn't instantly known him was that he had never before seen him outside the surroundings of the camp meeting.

The handsome young preacher had a musical speaking style that would drift into a dark chant. He had a gift; no doubt about it.

Craig turned and fired a bright, toothy grin at Alder, nodding greeting. He was indeed a fine-looking man, evenly featured and with thick, dark hair that parted neatly down the middle and stayed combed even in the wind, unlike Alder's own thinning wisps. One of Joe Alder's regrets in life was that Alder men were always thin of hair.

Alder walked up to the preacher and stuck out his hand. "Hello, Reverend Craig."

"Hello. Marshal Alder, isn't it? I've seen you come to meeting, I believe." Craig's voice sounded scratchy today and soft—a ghost of the thunderous voice that boomed across the meeting ground night after night.

"I've been there, indeed. Good preaching, sir, very good. I see you've already met my wife, Sally, here." Alder leaned over the counter and kissed her on the cheek, publicly reaffirming his claim. Sally was a pretty, charming woman and the Reverend Craig was unmarried, so Alder wanted to make darn sure Craig knew how things stood.

"Yes, indeed," Craig said. His bright grin was like a continual beam of light. "She's been very helpful. I preached my throat raw last night, and she's been kind enough to provide me this salve."

"It's good salve. Smear some on your neck and wrap a hot, wet cloth about it, and it'll bring your voice back. It's costly, I admit, but worth every cent."

The preacher's smile flickered uncertainly for a moment. Sally hurried to say, "Joe, I gave him the salve. A gift for a minister doing a good work, you know."

Alder's face flushed. "Oh. Yes. Of course. I should have thought to make that offer myself."

Craig's smile cranked back up to full wick. "And I do thank you fine folks for your kind gift," he said. "May God bless you both—and please come to services each night you can."

"We shall," Sally said. "And Reverend, might you be free to share supper with Joe and me tonight? Our house sits at the end of Broad Street. It's the big blue clapboard with flower boxes along the porch rail."

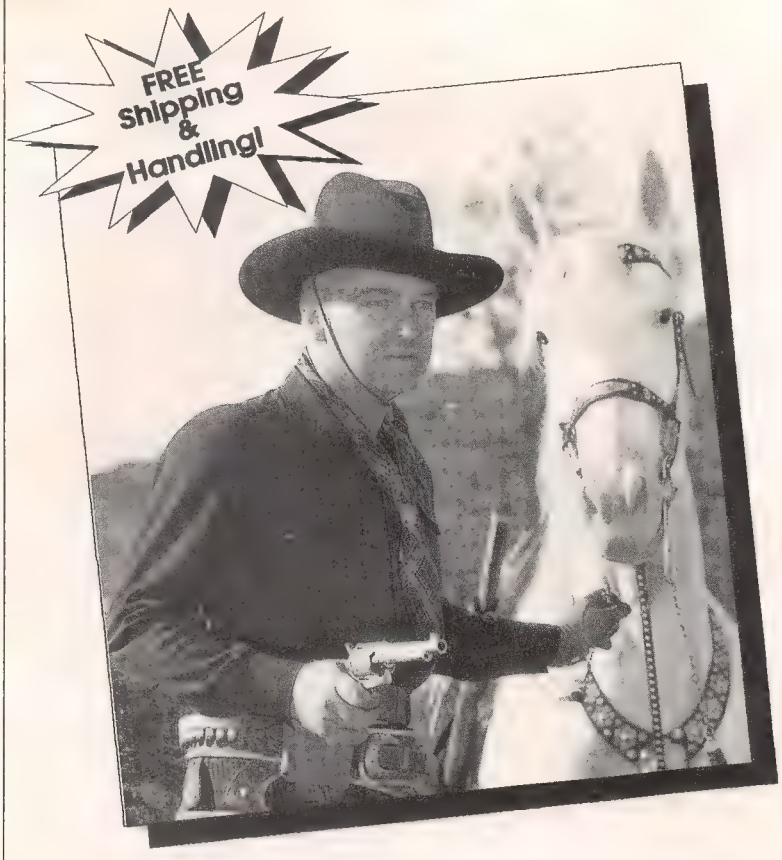
Alder was not surprised to hear his wife give the invitation. Sally was always inviting folks over for meals—sometimes people who were no more than good customers of the mercantile. The Alders had no children, and opening their home to visitors was a way they compensated for how empty the place sometimes seemed with only two of them there. Their house was Joe Alder's family home, and large enough to accommodate a family of fifteen or so.

"Why, how kind," Craig said. "I'd be pleased."

"Wonderful. If you can come about an hour and a half before preaching, I think that would be just about right," Sally said.

"I look forward to it." He shook Alder's hand again, and nodded to Sally. "Good day, and thank you again for the salve. God bless you both."

"I have a natural appreciation for that man," Sally said after he was gone. "I suppose it's the pure goodness of him that is so appealing. It just shines from him." She gave her husband a wry look.



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"You made me blush, kissing me like that in front of him."

"Just wanted him to know this particular calf is branded. And considering this 'natural appreciation' talk I'm hearing, maybe it's a good thing I did."

She grinned mischievously, making her all the prettier. "So I'm your calf now, Joe Alder?" She glanced around to make sure nobody else was in the store, then vaulted right across the counter to where Alder stood. She had lost neither the nimbleness nor playfulness of her girlhood. Alder embraced her, pulling her close.

"In my arms—that's right, where you belong. And I don't want no fine-looking preachers getting notions about you, neither. I got to watch out. Tut swears that preacher is after every woman in town."

"Why, you're jealous. Of a preacher, no less. I'm surprised at you, Joe Alder. And what does Tut know? He's never said a sensible word in his life."

"Maybe not, but I ain't taking chances. A man has to keep watch on his treasure, don't he?" Alder planted a kiss on her lips.

She hugged Alder a few moments, then said, "I suppose now that we've got a guest coming, I'll have to leave the store early today to cook a worthy supper. That preacher is an awfully cheerful sort, isn't he? Out of the pulpit, at least."

"Seems to be. But he does turn fierce come preaching time. Seems to be the absolute devil on wickedness."

"Not the best choice of words, considering he's a preacher, husband."

He thought about it and chuckled. "No, reckon it ain't, at that."

The Reverend Craig's eating manners were as impeccable as his grooming. He was a nibbler, taking clean, small bites. For Alder, who was accustomed to dining with Tut Sanders, this was a novel and fascinating sight. Craig had managed to consume two big pieces of Sally's fried chicken without even greasing his lips. Remarkable. Sanders would have been sucking the bones and wiping his beard on his sleeve by now.

> "I expect never to marry," the preacher said, "because of my past. I was orphaned very young, you see, and had a hard life."

Sally Alder asked, "More biscuits, Reverend Craig?" The preacher had complimented her profusely on the biscuits since the start of the meal, pleasing her.

"No, no. He leaned back and patted his midsection. "If I eat any more, I won't be fit to preach at all. But oh, the temptation! I haven't had such fine fare for weeks."

"I'd say it's hard for an unmarried traveling man to keep himself in good victuals," Alder commented.

"Oh, it is. I'm left to count mostly on good folk such as yourselves to keep me fed. Otherwise, it's catch as catch can, or can't. When the open road is a man's home, he learns to make do. But the Lord provides."

"Do you have plans for a real home and wife someday?" Sally asked.

A shadow passed over Craig's face. "A 'real home' may be a long time coming for me, if ever it comes at all. I expect never to marry."

"Oh. Because of your work, I suppose."

"Partly—but no, not really." His tone grew somber. "Because of my past. I was orphaned very young, you see, and had a hard life in boyhood. Some of my experiences have made me wary of ever taking the marriage vow, much less parental responsibility, upon myself."

Alder glanced at Sally. By coincidence, they had come upon a close-to-home, painful topic for her. She herself had been an orphan since infancy. There were stories of her orphanage life that she hadn't yet told even her husband—things she said she didn't like even to remember, much less talk of, and which Alder wasn't at all sure he would ever want to hear anyway. Alder was thinking it would be best to change the subject quickly, but she plunged into it, a solemn expression on her face.

"Were you raised in an orphanage, Reverend Craig?" she asked.

"Yes. from the age of six. My mother and father raised me before that."

"I was an orphan, too," Sally said.

"No! I had no idea. I hope your experience was better than mine."

"My life wasn't a happy one—not until I was grown and met Joe."

Alder decided to try and brighten an increasingly somber conversation. "Well, Reverend," he said in a cheerful tone, "at least you have some memory of your parents, and memories count for much."

"No, I don't," he said. "I don't remember my parents at all."

Alder gave him a puzzled look. "But you said you were with your parents until you were six."

"So I was—but still, I have not one memory of them, nor of any part of my life prior to entering the orphanage. I realize it sounds odd—it *is* odd. But the simple truth is that I have no memories at all of my early life. My mind has erased it all, like a cloth wip-

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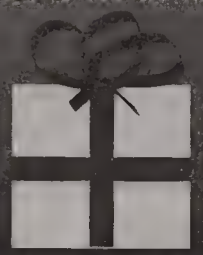

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ing over a slate. I know why. My mother was murdered, you see, before my eyes. It was too much for a boy to endure, and I blotted out the memory. The only reason I know today that I witnessed the murder was that I was told I did. The police questioned me closely —I have a vague memory of that—but I could tell them nothing. Already my mind had done me the mercy of erasing what I had seen."

"Merciful heaven!" Sally exclaimed.

"Did they ever find the murderer?" Joe asked.

"A man was caught, tried, locked away. I'm told he died in prison."

"It was heaven's vengeance," Sally said.

"Don't speak of vengeance, ma'am," Craig chided gently. "It is our place to forgive, as we have been forgiven."

"And have you forgiven that man?" Alder asked.

"Yes," he answered promptly. "With God's help, I believe I have forgiven him. I confess that my lack of memory of his crime, and his victim, made forgiving easier than it would have been otherwise. I like to think that, even if I *did* remember, though, I would have forgiven him all the same."

Alder said, "Preacher, there's no reason you should have to talk of something so painful to you. You have my apology for having brought it up."

"No apology necessary. You couldn't know, and I make no secret of my experiences of life. As the hymn tells us, our fiery trials are designed to consume the dross and refine the gold within us. And perhaps it is for the best that my mind chose not to burden me with the memory of the tragedy."

They talked no more of anything but light and easy matters for the duration of the preacher's visit. When service time drew near, Alder drove Sally and Reverend Craig to the meeting grounds. They passed Sanders's rooming house along the way, and Alder sensed him watching them out the window, no doubt cringing at the sight of the preacher.

> "I have no memories of my early life. My mind has erased it all, like a cloth wiping over a slate," the preacher said.

That night the Reverend Craig preached like Alder had never heard any man preach before. His voice, now fully returned to him, boomed across the campground, piercing like the proverbial Sword of the Lord, raging like the fire that burned Moses' bush, ringing like the trumpet that sounds the end of time. Answer the call of God! he exhorted. Turn away from your life of wrong lest the right hand of God's wrath smite you! Repent! Turn! God calls you —close your ears and your heart at your own peril!

When he raised his arms and gave the final call, they swarmed to his altar by the score. Among the penitents were men Alder had jailed time and again for drunkenness, or brawling, or beating their wives. There were tears and cries and prayers, and above it all, standing in the glow of the torches that had been lighted about the speaking platform when darkness had come, stood Reverend Charles Craig, sweating and stooped liked a man who had just labored all day in field or mine, but looking satisfied and triumphant nonetheless. If ever there was a man born to his role in life, it was Craig.

"I've never seen anything like it," Alder said to Sally. "If we could keep him around Willow Creek there'd be little need for me and Tut any longer. There'd be few wrongs left for us to right."

But she wasn't looking or listening. She was gazing at something to her left. Alder looked and saw the sad-faced woman who had been with the fat man in the Laura Belle that morning. She was standing at the back edge of the crowd, her hands crossed over the bulge of her pregnancy. Though her face was hidden from Alder by the darkness, he knew, simply could feel, that on it was the same expression of deep melancholy she had worn earlier.

Alder looked for the fat man, but he was not with the woman. Perhaps she had come to the camp meeting alone. Or perhaps he was in the swell of repentants standing before the platform and receiving new, quieter exhortations from Reverend Craig. Indeed he was. Scanning the clump of people, Alder saw him. He stood out against the more average-sized folks around him.

"That poor young woman," Sally whispered to Alder. "I've been watching her. I've never seen anyone seem so burdened. The sadness just seems to flow from her!" She paused, biting her lip. "I'm going to introduce myself to her, Joe. Maybe I can help her in some way."

Alder had figured Sally would do something like that. Sympathy was in her nature. "Go ahead, then," he encouraged.

But Sally had hardly advanced two yards before the woman noticed her, tensed, drew back, and hurriedly walked away. Sally watched her go, then came back to Alder and slipped her hand into his.

"I don't think she wanted to be helped tonight," Alder said.

900 MHz breakthrough!

New technology launches wireless speaker revolution...

Recoton develops breakthrough technology which transmits stereo sound through walls, ceilings and floors up to 150 feet.

Breakthrough wireless speaker design blankets your home with music.

By Charles Anton

If you had to name just one new product "the most innovative of the year," what would you choose? Well, at the recent *International Consumer Electronics Show*, critics gave Recoton's new wireless stereo speaker system the *Design and Engineering Award* for being the "most innovative and outstanding new product."

Recoton was able to introduce this whole new generation of powerful wireless speakers due to the advent of 900 MHz technology. This newly approved breakthrough enables Recoton's wireless speakers to rival the sound of expensive wired speakers.

Recently approved technology. In June of 1989, the *Federal Communications Commission* allocated a band of radio frequencies stretching from 902 to 928 MHz for wireless, in-home product applications. Recoton, one of the world's leading wireless speaker manufacturers, took advantage of the FCC ruling by creating and introducing a new speaker system that utilizes the recently approved frequency band to transmit clearer, stronger stereo signals throughout your home.

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Recoton gives you the freedom to listen to music wherever you want. Your music is no longer limited to the room your stereo is in. With the wireless headphones you can listen to your TV, stereo or CD player while you move freely between rooms, exercise or do other activities. And unlike infrared headphones, you don't have to be in a line-of-sight with the transmitter, giving you a full 150 foot range.

The headphones and speakers have their own built-in receiver, so no wires are needed between you and your stereo. One transmitter operates an unlimited number of speakers and headphones.

Recoton's transmitter sends music through walls to wireless speakers over a 75,000 square foot area.

Crisp sound throughout your home. Just imagine being able to listen to your stereo, TV, VCR or CD player in any room of your home without having to run miles of speaker wire. Plus, you'll never have to worry about range because the new 900 MHz technology allows stereo signals to travel over distances of 150 feet or more through walls, ceilings and floors without losing sound quality.

One transmitter, unlimited receivers. The powerful transmitter plugs into a headphone, audio-out or tape-out jack on your stereo or TV component, transmitting music wirelessly to your speakers or headphones. The speakers plug into an outlet. The one transmitter can broadcast to an unlimited number of stereo speakers and headphones. And since each speaker contains its own built in receiver/amplifier, there are no wires running from the stereo to the speakers.

Full dynamic range. The speaker, mounted in a bookshelf-sized acoustically constructed cabinet, provides a two-way bass reflex design for individual bass boost control. Full dynamic range is achieved by the use of a 2" tweeter and 4" woofer. Plus, automatic digital lock-in tuning guarantees optimum reception and eliminates drift. The new technology provides static-free, interference-free sound in virtually any environment. These speakers are also self-amplified; they can't be blown out no matter what your stereo's wattage.

Stereo or hi-fi, you decide. These speakers have the option of either stereo or hi-fi sound. You can use two speakers, one set on right channel and the other on left, for full stereo separation. Or, if you just want an extra speaker in another room, set it on mono and listen to both channels on one speaker. Mono combines both left and right channels for hi-fi sound. This option lets you put a pair of speakers in the den and get full stereo separation or put one speaker in the kitchen and get complete hi-fi sound.

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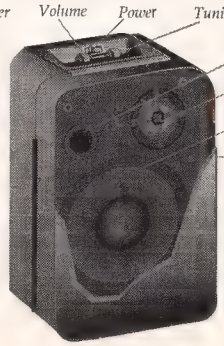

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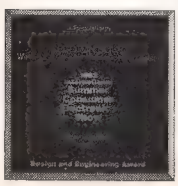

Recoton's Design and Engineering Award

"She seemed so sad," Sally answered. "Like a woman who has seen her own grave. Why would she be that way, Joe?"

"I can't imagine," he said.

As the camp meeting broke up for the night, Alder looked one more time down toward the speaking platform. The fat man was standing nearer Craig now, seemingly waiting for him to finish his conversation with another of the penitents. There were tears on his face. Alder smiled to himself, irreverently thinking, *Maybe he needs some preacherly advice on how to repent proper for the sin of gluttony.*

That night, Sally Alder tossed sleeplessly for an hour after retiring. At length her husband rolled over and asked, "You still thinking about that sad-looking woman?"

"Yes, and about Reverend Craig. It's so tragic, thinking of a child seeing his own mother murdered. So many sad things in the world, so many sad people. I wonder why it must be that way?"

"If you find the answer to that, then the Reverend Craig ought to step aside and let you do the preaching," Alder replied. He paused, then added, "You never can know what kind of weights folks carry around hidden in their hearts. It's sad, when you think about it."

"It truly is," Sally said.

The next day brought more than the usual activity to the law enforcement team of Alder and Sanders. A wire came from Wichita warning them that an escaped prisoner might be fleeing in their direction, and on the heels of that, a man riding through town told them of a man who had cussed at him and brandished a rifle when he chanced to ride near what he thought was an abandoned old line shack five miles north of town. Sanders and Alder armed up and rode out to investigate,

Alder couldn't relax; he had the tight, hot feeling at the back of his neck that he got when something somewhere was wrong.

and discovered that the man was no escaped convict, just a familiar drunk who had graced their cell four times in as many months a year ago. He had vanished for a bit and now had returned. They warned him against threatening travelers on the public roadways and then headed home to Willow Creek. And when they arrived back at the office, another wire had come in saying the escapee had been recaptured two hours before, still in Wichita. They had wasted most of the day because of a harmless drunk and a fugitive who wasn't even nearby. And Sanders was already in a foul humor, dreading his night's duty at the camp meeting.

Sally was tired that evening, having held down the store work by herself all day, and so she didn't attend the camp meeting. After supper Alder went out onto the porch for a smoke, expecting to hear the distant sound of Reverend Craig's voice, as he had on previous camp meeting nights when he remained home. Odd, but he couldn't hear him at all, even though the wind was in the right direction for it. He smoked a couple of pipefuls, then fetched out a book and lamp and sat down to read in the porch rocker, thinking of retiring early. Yet for some reason he couldn't relax; he had the tight, hot feeling at the back of his neck that he got when something somewhere was wrong, and he didn't know just what it was.

A flux of citizens appeared within a few minutes, indicating the camp meeting had broken up. Alder looked at his watch, puzzled. It seemed awfully early for the service to be ending. Then Sanders came striding out of the crowd toward him, looking cheerful.

"Evening, Tut. What's going on?"

"Not a blessed thing, glad to say. No real preaching tonight. A few songs and prayers and such, and everybody headed on home."

"That's right peculiar. Craig has tended to be long-winded up till now."

"That's the thing—Craig didn't preach. And he said the camp meetings are ended for good. It's over."

"What? Has he took sick or something?"

"Well, there *did* appear to be something wrong with him, but he didn't give no specificals." That was the way Sanders always said *specifics,* one of the few big words he knew, or thought he did. "He just got up, said the meetings were ending, quoted a Bible verse or two about the wicked being smote down, and said good-bye. He didn't seem at all like hisself. And here's what struck me oddest: When he come down off the platform, he went straight to a woman in the crowd and pulled her aside. You'll never guess who it was."

"Tell me."

"That sad-looking lady friend of our fat man from the Laura Belle. Oh, the preacher was talking something fearsome to her, while everyone was leaving. Real serious talking, with her putting her hand to her mouth and looking real worked up."

"That's interesting. You know, Tut, old fatty himself went down to the altar last night. Was he there this evening?"

"Didn't see hide nor hair of him."

Sally had come out onto the

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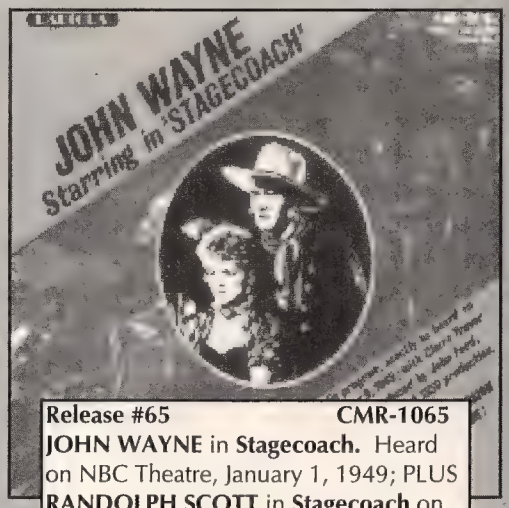

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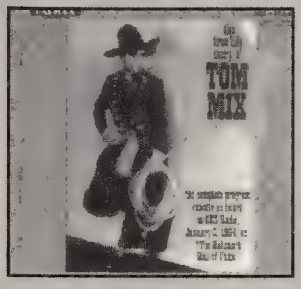

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porch when Alder was talking to Sanders. He paused and touched his hat. "Evening, Sally."

"Evening, Tut. I heard what you were saying." She turned to Alder. "Joe, it sounds to me like the reverend is sick. Maybe he needs taking in, and care. He's staying in the Smith boardinghouse, isn't he, Tut?"

"That's right," Sanders said. "Thank heaven he ain't living in mine. It would give me the willies something fierce to have him close by."

Alder stood, that hot feeling at the back of his neck all the more intense. "I'll go see how he is," Alder said. "I feel like something's not right. Tut, you come with me."

"Aw, Joe, I don't want to go see no psalm-singing preacher."

"Don't try to back out. You're my deputy."

Willow Creek was a small town, and Sanders and Alder walked across it in short measure, reaching the boardinghouse where Craig had taken lodging for the duration of the camp meetings.

And then Alder saw the pregnant young woman. He hadn't been looking for her, but there she was, seated on the stone wall surrounding the town well. She was alone; her face was buried in her hands and she was weeping heavily. Sanders saw her, too, and stopped, looking at Alder uncertainly.

Alder had never liked intruding into the privacy of others, but considering that this woman had last been seen with the man they were going to call on, it seemed necessary to approach her. And he did, reluctantly, with Sanders lolling unhappily behind.

"Ma'am?"

She looked up sharply, surprised. "Yes?"

"Ma'am, are you well?"

To his surprise, a smile slowly spread across her tear-streaked face. "Yes," she said. "I am well. I'm free—the devil is gone and I'm free!"

Something about the pregnant woman's manner and words gave Alder a chill. He wanted to turn and hurry away from her.

She didn't sound any too lucid. From the vaguely religious tone of her words Alder assumed she was talking of a spiritual experience. Or maybe she was drunk; the vacant way she looked at Alder might indicate it. But about her was no smell of liquor, and when she stood she did not waver. Her eye fell to his badge.

"Are you the sheriff?"

"Town marshal."

"Oh. He said you would be coming for him. Are you going to get him now?"

"Who?"

"The holy man. The good man. The man who killed the devil."

Something about her manner and words gave Alder a chill. He actually wanted to turn and hurry away from her. Sanders must have felt much the same, considering the way he drew back and gaped at her.

"Who is the holy man, ma'am?"

"The preacher, Reverend Craig. He killed the devil and set me free. He told me himself. Don't be hard with him, Marshal. I was always afraid before, but now I'm not afraid. It was a good thing he did. A good thing, even if it was harsh. I had been a prisoner before, with nowhere else to go. But now the devil is killed, and I'm glad. Glad!"

And then she abruptly turned and walked away, and though Alder knew he should stop her, get her name, and question her further, instead he just stood there as if stunned and let her go. He rubbed the back of his neck with his knuckles; it throbbed almost like a beating heart.

Sanders said, "Joe, that woman's loco."

"Maybe so. But right now I believe we need to find the preacher, as quickly as possible. This talk of killing worries me."

They went on to the boardinghouse where Craig was lodged, climbed the outer stairs, and paused. Now that Alder was here he felt reluctant to knock. But he had to, and did.

"Reverend Craig? It's Joe Alder. You in there?"

There was no answer, but Alder heard a chair being scooted across the floor and its creak as someone sat down in it.

"Preacher? You hear me?"

This time he answered, softly, wearily. "Yes. You may come in now. I knew you would be here eventually. I'm ready for you."

They opened the door. The preacher was there in the lamplit room, seated in a straight-backed chair beside the bed, on which lay the fat man from the Laura Belle with hands folded across his chest and eyes weighted shut with coins. He was laid out as neatly as if an undertaker had fixed him for burial, his face discolored in death. If he had to guess, Alder would say he had been dead since sometime the previous night.

Alder and Sanders walked in silently and went to the bedside. There was a great bloody spot on the dead man's shirt, crusted to the color of rust, and a hole like a knife would make.

"Oh, Lordy," Sanders whispered.

"I'm sorry about the blood on him," Craig said hollowly. "I tried to dab off as much of it as I could, but it stains, you know. One can never seem to get it all out. I even tried rubbing it off with some of

that salve your wife gave me, Marshal, but it didn't help."

"Preacher, what happened here?" Alder asked.

"I've killed him," Craig responded. His manner and voice had the same dazed, vacant quality Alder had noted in the pregnant woman. "I killed him with that knife, lying on the desk. I wiped it off so it wouldn't stain the desktop."

"You're telling me you stabbed this man to death? Did he attack you?"

"Oh, no, no. He came to me at last night's service to seek me out. He had come many a mile just to find me, and even came here with me from the meeting ground. You see that he's dead now. I'm sorry it happened. I didn't want it to, but there was no other way."

"I don't understand."

"He was going to kill again, you see. Very soon. The demon was on him again, urging him to kill. He told me himself."

"He was going to kill . . . Wait a minute. Are you saying he attempted to kill you, and you were forced to defend yourself, and—"

"No! No!" The preacher shook his head as if perturbed by Alder's inability to comprehend. "I told you, he didn't attack me. It wasn't to protect *me* that I killed him."

"Then, why?"

From the street outside came the sound of a woman singing in a high, nearly girlish voice. Craig heard it and went to the window. He threw back the curtain and looked out onto the street. The pregnant woman was there, standing beneath one of Willow Creek's five oil-burning lampposts, singing toward the sky. Craig watched her silently a few moments, then stepped aside so the others could see her. "It was for *her*. Otherwise, he would have killed her, just like he killed the others he told me about. Helpless, desperate women, just like her. He would take them in, sometimes even marry them, but in the end the demon would grip him and he would take their lives." Craig's voice grew tight. "He confessed it all to me. He said I was the only one who would understand. The only one who could help him be free of his demon."

"He was going to kill again, you see. Very soon. The demon was on him again, urging him to kill," the preacher said.

"Wait a minute. What you're saying is that this man here has murdered young women, and that he was about to murder that young woman out there?"

"Precisely. She was his companion, very much under his control. He presented her to everyone as his wife, but she wasn't, he confessed. There was only one way to stop him from killing her."

Alder violently shook his head. "No, Reverend. don't you see what you've done? This is murder! You've murdered a man based on nothing more than a bunch of loco talk. You don't know that he would really kill her, or that he's ever killed anyone at all."

"Oh, I knew."

"You *couldn't* have known! He was a stranger. For all you could say he was a madman, telling big stories he dreamed up."

The preacher's face suddenly changed. Bitter fury showed in his features. He clenched and raised a fist, and spoke his next words through gritted teeth. "Yes, I knew. I knew because I knew *him*. He was no stranger to me—oh, no, not this man. Do you know what it is, Marshal, to have memories come upon you in a rush, like water breaking over a dam? *I* do. It happened to me while he spoke. His face, his form all came rushing back to me, and memories that my mind had buried for years were laid out before me as clearly as if they had happened yesterday. I tell you, that man lying on that bed is the very man I saw murder my own mother. Oh, yes, indeed, I knew him, just as he knew me, and what I saw him do so many years ago."

Alder was so taken aback that for a few moments he could find nothing to say. Tut Sanders, meanwhile, had edged back against the wall, eyeing the door as if he longed to bolt for it. Lacking even the sparse information that Craig had earlier given to Alder and his wife, he was utterly confused, but even his bewilderment was hardly greater than Joe Alder's at the moment.

The marshal stammered, then said, "But you said a man was arrested and convicted of that murder, and died in prison."

"There was no such man. He was a contrivance—a tale I told because I couldn't bear to tell the truth. My mother's killer was never caught, Marshal. He escaped his punishment . . . until now."

Something began to gel in Alder's mind. He looked closely at the pallid face of the corpse on the bed, then at the preacher. "Merciful heaven," he whispered, a sudden and shocking suspicion very nearly confirmed by what he saw.

"Ah, you see now, do you?" Craig said. "Look at our faces —you see how much we are the same!"

Alder took a deep breath. The pain in the back of his neck throbbed even harder now. He *did* understand. "You said you were an orphan. You said your mother was murdered—but you never told us what happened to your father."

"No. How could I tell you or

anyone so terrible a thing—that my mother died at my own father's hands? I was no orphan, Marshal. My father didn't die. He killed my mother and deserted me, left me to a hellish life in an orphanage. I wasn't a true orphan, but my life was no different than if my father had been dead." He paused, shuddering. "If only he *had* been dead. If only!"

"God help us," Alder said.

"Yes, yes, indeed, God help us. God help *me,* for I don't even know now what is sin and what is righteousness. That man there walked back into my life, bringing back every ugly memory with him, and now I'm confused. God help me, I feel so lost." He stopped speaking abruptly and seemed to be on the verge of an emotional outburst. With an obvious effort of will he regained control, then walked to the bedside and looked down at the dead man.

"My mother was the first of his victims. He told me about them all—told me how sorrowful he was for what he did to them. But he knew he could never stop himself from doing it all over again. He had lost himself to his demon. He had come to believe that only by his own dying could he be sure that he would ever be free, but he lacked the courage to make his own end. He came to me because he felt I was the one person who would understand, who could do what must be done. He had heard I had become a preacher, and he tracked me down." A tear trailed down Craig's face. "And I did what he wanted. I didn't fail him. Did I do right, Marshal? You tell me. I've lost the ability to tell."

It came to Alder that not one but two men had died, and it was beyond his power to say which passing was the more tragic.

Alder could find nothing to say.

The woman outside was still singing. Craig went back to the window and watched her walk slowly out of the light of the lamppost and into the darkness. "I found her at the meeting ground tonight, told her what I had done. She wept out of relief, told me I was good and holy, that I had killed the devil. She had been afraid of him, you see, but even more afraid to leave him. She had feared he would hurt her. Now she is free. That much, at least, is good—isn't it?"

"I must arrest you, you understand," Alder said quietly. "You'll be charged with murder."

For the first time, Tut Sanders spoke directly to the preacher. "Mister, help me to understand this. Are you saying that that man there *wanted* to die?"

"He wanted to be free," the preacher replied. "Free of himself. And I freed him."

Sanders's face was cold, staring, still showing no comprehension. Seeing that, Craig became emotional again. "I had to do it, did I not?" he asked pleadingly. "He told me himself it was the only way. It was his command to me as his son, and is it not the duty of a son to obey his father? Tell me, Marshal, is it not? What else could I have done? Can you give me no answer? Why do you just stand there, staring like that?"

The preacher gazed at the marshal, awaiting an answer Joe Alder could not provide. The marshal knew only that behind Craig's peering eyes nothing remained of the righteous, fiery holy man he had watched stirring souls to repentance by the glow of camp meeting torchlight. It came to him that not one but two men had died in this room, in two very different ways, and it was beyond his power to say which passing was the more tragic.

So all he said was, "Come on, Preacher. It's time to go." Then they blew out the light, closed the door, and walked out together into the night, marshal and deputy each gripping an arm of the weeping, broken preacher—the man who had killed the devil, and in the same stroke had killed the man he himself had been as well. The Reverend Charles Craig would never again be what he had been before, and Joe Alder found that terribly sad.

They walked across Willow Creek in silence, toward the jail. From somewhere out in the darkness, they could still hear the high, faint sound of the woman singing.

"At least she is free," Craig said.

"Yes," Alder replied. "At least she is free."

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ALLOW SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WILD LOVE

Stoney's face whitened. "You're a liar," he shouted. Then the man he had spoken to turned, and Stoney caught the glint of a well-oiled Colt. Stoney, at fifty, was as limber as a mountain cat.

Though gray-haired and leather-skinned, his blue eyes blazed with all the fight he had had at twenty. Now he had called out Banyan, a man age had shaped out like a potato but who had been a fair hand with a gun in his day. Banyan probably didn't know that Stoney hadn't strapped leather in some time. There was no way to uncall it.

The whole ugly situation had developed, just moments before, out of what had been a meeting of old friends. Emma didn't like Stoney to drink too much. So when he

by David Curran

"I FELT LIKE A FOOL WHEN I WAS HAULING THAT DEAD HORSE OUT HERE," BANYAN SAID, "BUT YOUR WOMAN WAS INSISTENT."

went to check the stable, he allowed himself but one whiskey at the Nugget. Ed, a man in his seventies, ran the stable for them competently, even to depositing the income in the bank, but Stoney liked to oversee things. As was his custom, Stoney went for his one at the Nugget and had paid no mind to other men at the bar until he'd had his first sip.

He'd just taken a taste when the man next to him said, "Stoney —Stoney Carr. Is that you?"

Stoney turned. He stared at the man for a time. His long coat had a cover of dust. A droopy hat sloped down his face, hiding all but a grizzled beard. Then the man's head rose, and Stoney peered into the eyes of Jake Banyan.

"Jake!" Stoney exclaimed.

Jake's grin showed broken yellow teeth.

"Heard you're doing well, Stoney. I've heard of your horses all the way to Kansas."

Stoney, pleased, smiled broadly.

"Clem," Stoney said to the bartender. "Bring this man some of my stock." Then, looking at Jake, he said, "Haven't seen you in, well now, onto thirty years."

Banyan nodded.

"Was the weddin'," Banyan said after the bartender swabbed a new glass with a wet rag, plunked it on the counter, and poured from a bottle hidden beneath the bar.

"Well," Banyan said, "that was the last time you saw me at least to recognize me. I'm dern glad you recovered and made a good life for yourself."

The words brought back a memory that Stoney was wont to forget. "What you been doing, Jake?"

"Herding cattle, mostly. But I'm getting old, tired."

Stoney understood. Banyan was at least ten years older than he was. Trail herding was a hard life for a man in his sixties.

"Maybe I could use a hand," Stoney said carefully. A man of Banyan's experience was deserving of being a foreman, but Stoney had a good one. Still, he could find an old friend and one-time employee of his wife's family a place.

"Be an honor to work for the Wild Love," Banyan said. "You've made something of it."

"All luck. If it weren't for the fact that I was a dern fool, or that one horse that almost got me killed, it wouldn't be." Stoney said.

"I know," Banyan said. "I felt the dern fool myself when I was hauling that dead horse out here." Banyan was looking down at his drink and failed to see the look of bewilderment that came across Stoney's face. "But your woman was insistent and wouldn't take no for an answer. If I hadn't been working for Emma's aunt for years, I wouldn't have. But you shoulda seen the ravens and this one vulture trailing me. Even had a bear come up to the camp one night before I got to your place."

"You gone daft?" Stoney said, unable to control the anger and confusion that welled up.

Banyan looked up. This time the bewilderment was on his face.

"That horse was the start of my line. Emma brought him back here and bred him. What is all this about hauling a dead horse?"

"The horse was shot. Hit by a stray bullet when they shot you. Or at least I think it was a stray shot. There was some thought it was done on purpose. Emma shot it after they took you to the doc's."

That was the moment Stoney had called Banyan a liar. Now, Stoney was looking at the man. Expecting Banyan to draw, not knowing Stoney had no gun.

Banyan didn't move; his big hands stayed on the bar. His work-worn fingers tightened on the whiskey glass. A sad look came over his face. "I ain't gonna draw with you, Stoney. Emma'd never forgive me if I kilt you, and I'm of no mind to. I'm sorry. I thought you knew. Perhaps you best have a talk with Emma."

The man had called Stoney's wife a liar. Stoney knew he should hit him or worse. Instead, he looked at the man for a moment and then turned, hurrying for the door and the Wild Love.

Stoney, though born in Brooklyn, New York, had lived two years in St. Louis, Missouri, before coming out to Montana. His widowed father, a fairly prosperous storekeeper, had died in St. Louis and left Stoney a small inheritance. Stoney, at twenty-two, had headed west. By the time Stoney had ridden into Red Gulch, he had only a few hundred dollars left.

Stoney had arrived in town in the afternoon and had gone directly to the stable. Except for scattered straw, it was bare. Not a single horse stirred in a stall. Stoney was backing out, looking for a stable hand, when he bumped smack into Emma. She had skin as light as a newborn babe's and wore her hair, the color of wheat, in a cloudlike cluster of curls. Her green eyes in that heart-shaped face seemed to smile

AS STONEY TURNED TO LOOK AT DAVIDSON, THE DECK IN DAVIDSON'S HANDS VANISHED AND A DERRINGER APPEARED. TWO SHOTS RANG OUT.

at him for a moment, measure him.

Though Stoney was not aware of it, he was a fairly handsome young man. Just shy of six feet tall, he had broad, well-muscled shoulders from lifting crates in his father's store. Brown hair curled from beneath his hat. His deep blue eyes would have caught the interest of many a young woman if Stoney had been a bit less shy when it came to the fair sex.

To Stoney, Emma seemed an angel in a dress the color of the sky. The smile in her eyes reached her lips for just an instant. He smiled back and lifted his hat, but her smile vanished.

"If you don't know how to walk like a gentleman," she said, in a voice full of righteous anger, "perhaps you should stay on the street like a horse." The fact that they were on the street at the time had seemed to pass her by entirely. Then she had marched off proudly.

The next day he saw her walking down the street. Her dress, this time the color of the bitterroot flower, seemed to float about her. Wanting desperately to talk to her, he instead found himself shyly moving to avoid her. After she passed he followed her with his eyes, kicking himself for his failure of nerve.

Stoney was too young and too green to know he wasn't much of a gambler. He won often enough against unskilled cowhands and greenhorns, so that in the time since his father died his inheritance had only trickled away. But as the days went by, and more failures to talk to the beautiful girl who soon began to occupy his every thought occurred, what skill Stoney did have failed him. His money began vanishing like water from a gunshot trough.

It was his luck to be at the Nugget one evening a week after his arrival. Stoney was playing with a gambler named Davidson and three cattlemen—two brothers and an uncle—for what was, considering Stoney's financial situation, high stakes. Most of the money he had left was in the game. Davidson had added to the pot a deed to the town's only stable and a small ranch outside of town he had won just before Stoney arrived in town.

Davidson's fingers were flying out over the table top dealing the cards when one of the brothers, Salty Pike, said quietly, "You're dealing off the bottom." Pike's hands still held his cards, yet the yellowed eyes in the pockmarked face were cold.

As Stoney turned to look at Davidson, Davidson's hands moved. The deck in his hands vanished and a derringer appeared. Before his hideout gun could roar, two shots rang out. Stoney turned to see Pike's gun smoking. Davidson slumped bloodily to the table.

Stoney turned and looked at Pike. Pike's gun swung toward him. "He was cheating?" Stoney asked.

"As if you didn't know," Pike's brother Colby said. His gun was now drawn also.

"I didn't have nothing to do with him," Stoney said. Stunned, he raised his hands.

"We're thinking you was in on it," Pike said.

From across the room the bartender spoke. "That fella just got into town. Davidson's been here almost a year." He looked directly at Stoney. "I don't mean you no offense, mister, and I don't want you should take this personal, but you ain't good enough to even be playing with Davidson."

Stoney blanched. And he felt anger stirring in him. What stopped it was Salty and Colby putting away their guns. "I guess we were mistaken then," Pike said, still eyeing Stoney warily.

"What will we do about the pot?" Stoney asked. "We could just call."

Stoney laid his hand down. He had a full house—aces over jacks.

The others put their cards down. Salty's full house was tens over sevens. The other two had three pair between them.

"Well," Stoney said, reaching for the pot. "I guess it's mine."

"Hold it," Colby Pike said.

"It don't set with us to give away our money on a hand that was misdealt," Pike said.

Stoney nodded. "Let's divide the pot," Stoney suggested. "Do you want me to count it?"

"No," Salty said heavily. "My brother and uncle and I are going to be needing to skedaddle, so we don't want to be tied down with no deed. You're going to take that deed and we'll be taking the cash."

The man was pushing. Stoney felt his anger grow. He wondered if he could ease his gun out into his hand without them being aware. Carefully, he slipped his hand off the table.

"I know what you're thinking, son," the elder of the group, Hal Pike, said. He was looking at Stoney kindly. "Don't do it." He turned to his nephew. "And Salty, don't push so hard. I know you're

"THE HOUSE ISN'T ALL THAT BAD," EMMA SAID. "YOU HAVE TO SEE WHAT IT COULD BE WITH A LITTLE WORK."

mad, you've a right, but not at this fella." He turned back to Stoney. "Now, son, that hand was misdealt. Davidson said the banker valued that deed at five hundred dollars and I believe him. The only reason that deed was in there was because Davidson knew he couldn't lose it. The way I see it, you can come out way ahead. Besides, you'd be doing us a favor, and we'd be grateful."

Calming down, Stoney thought it over. It was a good deal. He nodded.

The next day Stoney, almost broke, had gone to survey his stable. He was inspecting the stalls when Emma appeared in the doorway.

"I'm glad to see you've settled for something more stable than gambling," she said, her tone as righteous as it had been that day on the street. Today she had on a yellow dress that brought out the texture of her hair.

He had turned to her in surprise. He had no intention of keeping the stable or the ranch. He'd hoped to make a quick sale and get back his gambling stake. Before he knew what he was about, he was saying, "I've got the ranch that come with it."

"Yes, I heard."

"I haven't seen it yet. In fact, I'm not quite sure how to get there, but—"

"I know where it is. Perhaps I could show you."

Stoney couldn't believe his luck.

From the outside the old ranch house looked weathered but firm. It was set between some ponderosa pines at the foot of the mountains, and it made Stoney understand why a man might call a home his castle. Yet when he had walked into the kitchen with Emma behind him, Stoney had shriveled inside. There were mouse droppings every which place. The stove looked like a buffalo had stampeded over it. A rusty fry pan on the kitchen table had eaten its way through the tablecloth. And, worst of all, the place smelled like a herd of cowhands had just taken their boots off after riding a long, wet trail.

For a moment Stoney had stood there in silence.

"Oh, what pretty curtains," Emma had said behind him.

Stoney had turned, but Emma had vanished through a doorway. Stoney followed.

Feathers littered the room from a mattress that looked like a bear had wrestled it. The smell was only a little less bad than in the kitchen. In one broken window, light yellow curtains blew in a slight breeze. Emma held the yellow material in her fingertips as she looked out at the snowcapped, towering mountains. Then, as if she could suddenly see Stoney's disappointment, she came to him. She stopped just inches from him and placed her hand upon his arm. "It's not all that bad," she said softly. "You have to see what it could be with a little work."

Stoney had smiled because she was smiling. Her touch had sent his blood to crackling. Emma looked good, even in a man's jeans and plaid shirt. Then, the thought of her, being there with him alone in that bedroom, made him think things he knew he shouldn't. Emma was a decent woman. He had to get out of there.

"We'd better go," he said, and started for the door.

She caught up with him out by the horses. He looked at her. Seeing her with that smile on her face, he could almost envision the house as it might be if it was fixed up.

"You're not too disappointed?"

"No!" He gave her a wide smile. As he turned to his horse he added, "In fact, I guess I'm lucky that Pike shot Davidson."

"What?"

Stoney didn't see the look of horror that crossed her face.

"I thought you knew. We was in a card game. The deed was in the pot. After Salty shot Davidson, the Pikes wanted to leave town quick, so I got it."

When he turned back to Emma her face seemed white. Stoney admitted to himself that he surely didn't claim to understand women. He moved to grab her arm lest she fall, but she gently pushed his hand away. "I have to go now." She climbed on her horse, and before Stoney could even get into the saddle, she had ridden off.

Marion Campbell, Emma's aunt and the owner of the general store, was a comely woman in her fifties with a head of gray hair. There was a resemblance in her eyes to Emma's. She folded her fingers together and a serious look replaced her smile. "Young man, she likes you. She thought you were the one who had been shot, when she first heard of the shooting. She was in such a state that I told her you were fine, and to distract her, I told her you'd taken over the stable." Marion looked down at the hand-hewn porch railings, then back at Stoney. "Maybe it was a mistake not to

"I COME TO ASK YOU TO MARRY ME, EMMA," STONEY SHOUTED. THE PRESSURE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR SUDDENLY CEASED.

tell her the whole truth. But you see, her father was killed just six months ago in a gunfight and the memory is still very painful for her."

Upset after talking to Emma's aunt, Stoney had gone to the Nugget for whiskey, where he had met Hal Greeley. A few years older than Stoney and rail thin, Greeley had a small ranch outside of town. What had impressed Stoney was that though Greeley was married, he came to the Nugget almost every night in a worn but clean white shirt. Although Greeley had won a few dollars from Stoney, and Stoney intended to get it back, he was in no mood to play. They'd had a few drinks and Stoney, to his regret, told Greeley about the events at the ranch, hoping a more experienced married man would be able to help him understand women.

When Greeley left, Stoney had bought a bottle and gone back to the stable. The next afternoon, each stroke of the manure rake echoed through Stoney's head like a hammer on an anvil. He had just paused to rest when a voice cracked like a whip behind him. "You!"

Stoney jumped. Marion Campbell stood not two feet from him, wearing her gingham store apron over her usual brown dress. Marion's eyes were blazing and her fists were raised. He had barely turned when she began pounding him.

"Whoa—whoa, now," he cried.

Although her blows weren't hard enough to do much damage, she backed him all the way to the end of the stall before she paused.

"What is this?" Stoney pleaded.

"What did my niece ever do to you?" Despite her fury, the woman looked at the point of tears.

"Nothin'."

"Then how dare you ruin her reputation?" the woman wailed.

Stoney was taken aback. He had to beg the story out of her. And she was close to attacking him again at a number of points. The gist of it was that Marion had had to close the store. The decent women of the town were coming there to talk about Emma. Stoney's conversation with Greeley of the night before—that Emma had gone out to his ranch house with him and had been with him in the bedroom—was spreading around town like a grass fire.

When Marion Campbell had left, Stoney had thought about it hard for half an hour.

"What do you want?" Marion asked after opening the door just a crack to his knock. Her face was puffy from crying, but her voice was full of anger.

"I'd like to see Miss Emma, please," Stoney said.

"Haven't you caused enough damage?" Marion asked. Stoney put his boot through the crack in the doorway. As Marion determinedly pushed the door shut, it slammed on Stoney's boot. Stoney tried talking to Marion, but there was no persuading the woman.

"Emma!" Stoney finally yelled as loudly as he could through the partly opened door.

"Now, you stop that," Marion bellowed and pushed all the harder on the door. Stoney held his ground. He was about to shout again when he saw Emma appear from a doorway.

"I come to ask you to marry me, Emma," Stoney shouted. The pressure on the other side of the door suddenly ceased, and the door slowly swung open. Stoney stepped just inside the door and took his hat awkwardly into his hands. Emma's face looked flushed. "I didn't say nothing bad about you. I was just so upset that you were upset I got to drinking and asked Greeley about it because he's married. I never knew he'd talk it about. But I ain't of no mind to ruin your reputation, so I've come to ask you to marry me."

Emma had stared at him for a long moment. She did not smile, and there wasn't a trace of warmth in her voice when she said, "I has hoping the man who asked me would get down on one knee."

Stoney walked over to her almost timidly, knelt down on one knee, and looked up into Emma's eyes. They were reddened from crying.

"I know I'm not much. But I can't abide folks thinking badly of you. Will you marry me, Emma?"

Emma looked into his eyes and a faint smile curved on her lips. "You're a good man, Stoney Carr. And I'm frankly pleased. But you don't have to marry me just because of a mistake. Besides, we barely know each other."

"Does that mean you don't want me?" Stoney had asked, his heart sinking.

Emma must have read the hurt in his eyes. "I think," she said, "what's called for is some courting."

Though he might have made more money had he attended the stable more and spent less time

STONEY WONDERED IF THE STALLION HAD BEEN LAME WHEN THE GREENHORN HAD BOUGHT HIM OR IF THE MAN HAD LAMED HIM.

courting Emma, or fixing the ranch up in case Emma decided to marry him, he didn't mind. He was happier than he'd ever been in his life. He and Emma got along splendidly. The only trouble came four Sundays after he'd proposed, when they were coming back from the church.

Stoney saw Greeley on the street, for the first time since the night at the Nugget. He left Emma's side at a run. Greeley saw Stoney coming, brought his fists up, and swung. Stoney ducked a right cross and knocked the man down with a single punch.

"You'd better learn to keep your mouth shut," Stoney hollered at the fallen man.

"You two-bit gambler," the angry Greeley shouted back as he sat up in the dusty street, fingering his jaw. "You ain't even got the brains to run a stable. Why don't you sell out before you run it bust?"

"You got a gun, you'd better get it," Stoney said.

But then Emma was in front of Stoney yelling, "No! No!" And before he knew what was happening she had her hands against his chest and was pushing at him. Looking down at her, he could see she was upset, so he began backing up. Then she pushed harder with her right than her left and Stoney was turned and she was grabbing his arm, tugging him.

They'd gone only a few steps when she began screaming. "If you ever do that, if you ever—"

"Wow," Stoney had said, aware there were eyes all around that were staring at them.

Taking her by the arm, he led her away between two buildings. When he was sure they were out of earshot and prying eyes, he turned to explain. But Emma had gathered her thoughts. Her eyes blazed into his as she said, "If you ever think of getting a gun and going after a man, or even wearing a gun, I'll never see you again."

Stoney just stared at her a moment. He put his hands on her arms to soothe her. "You don't understand," he said gently. "There are some things a man has to do. It don't mean I don't love you."

She pulled her arms free of his and started slapping at him. "Don't tell me that! Don't tell me that!" Stoney tried to take her into his arms, but she pushed him off. "That's exactly what my father said just before he went out and never came back," she said to him, then turned and ran home.

She'd refused to see him. Through Marion, she made it clear to Stoney that unless he apologized to Greeley and stopped wearing a gun, she'd have nothing more to do with him.

Finally, Stoney stopped wearing his gun and apologized. What had surprised him was that Greeley had apologized, too. He hadn't spoken about Emma but to his wife. And he had been drunk when he'd done so. It was his wife who'd spread the gossip.

Emma and Stoney were married in the town church six months after he proposed. Stoney had found that he was a better hand at animals than he was at gambling. In the months before he was married, all the income he'd managed to get from the stable went for fixing up the ranch. After, with a new wife, he'd discovered it was hard to make ends meet. Emma was always needing some such thing that Stoney had been able to do without. But Marion gave her niece credit at the store, and Stoney, who just didn't have the heart to tell his new wife no, had ever-increasing bills to pay. Stoney began to worry at times that the words Greeley had shouted in anger about his ability to run a business would prove to be the actual truth about him.

Thus he was working in the stable on the day that Dance O'Leary rode in looking like a greenhorn in a dusty business suit, with wire-rimmed spectacles and a dented derby hat.

Dance sort of fumbled off the horse. He looked up at Stoney and said, "Howdy" with an Irish brogue.

"Howdy," Stoney had replied, trying to keep himself from laughing at the man, who was probably the ripest greenhorn he had ever seen.

"I have an important business meeting at the bank. I wonder if you could watch my horse for a time."

Stoney was already looking at the horse, which was a stallion and was so obviously lame that only a fool could miss it. "That horse is lame. You shouldn't be riding it."

"Is it?" the man asked in a tone that gave no doubt that he had not the slightest inkling of the problem.

"What kind of horse is that?" Stoney asked. It was obviously not a western horse. It had thin legs and looked skittish.

"Don't know," the man said. "A man sold him to me. Told me he was a good horse for out here. I'm really in a hurry. Will you watch him for me?"

STONEY ALMOST COULDN'T KEEP HIMSELF FROM LAUGHING. THIS FELLOW WAS SO GREEN HE'D GIVEN HIS STALLION A GIRL'S NAME.

Stoney nodded and the man ran from the stable. Stoney went back and examined the horse. It was beautiful to look at but obviously not made for rough country. Stoney wondered if the stallion had been lame when the greenhorn had bought him or if the man had ridden him so hard he had lamed him. One thing was for sure. He was going to talk to the man about riding the horse out of here before it was healed.

He was busy doing his chores when the woman came. She was dressed in a man's shirt and jeans, but she filled them like no man ever could. Long black hair hung down past her shoulders from beneath an old hat. Unlike Emma at their first meeting, this woman smiled at Stoney and kept that smile. When her pretty brown eyes stayed right on him, as if he were a horse she was pleased to be buying, Stoney colored and looked off.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" he asked.

"I saw that horse and stopped in to look at it."

She walked by Stoney and looked the horse up and down.

"It is something you don't see," Stoney said.

"I'd say a Tennessee-bred racehorse. How much do you want for him?"

Stoney was so dumbfounded he couldn't speak for a moment.

"I'll tell you what," she said, hitting her palm with a pair of gloves. "I'll give you a thousand dollars for that horse right now."

Stoney was so amazed, it took him another moment to get his voice.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said evenly. "I'd like to oblige you, but that there's not my horse to sell. I can put you in touch with the owner, but even so, I don't think he'd be a good buy. That horse is lame now, and he's not a horse fit for these parts. He was bred for speed. He's good for it, I reckon. But a short race is about all he's good for."

She was looking into his eyes again, a mischievous smile on her face. "There is one other thing he is good for. He is a stallion, isn't he?"

Stoney flushed redder than a beet. All he could do was nod.

"I'm a horse breeder. I've got a ranch south of here. I'm sure his stock would really improve my herd. And I want him. But I can't stay here in town or I'd wait for the owner myself. I tell you what I'll do." Long fingers went to a pocket and came up with a stack of bills. "I'll give you fifty dollars now as a down payment. When I come back, if you have the horse, I'll pay you the rest of the thousand dollars. If not, you give me my fifty back. Any profit you make you can keep. Do we have a deal?"

Stoney couldn't believe his luck. He took the woman's hand and shook it. Her hand was warm like Emma's, yet her grip was softer. By the time he freed his hand he felt a little flustered. As beautiful as she was, the way she looked at him was leading to thoughts a married man, especially a newly married man, shouldn't have. He was glad when she turned and walked out of the stable. A moment later he chased after her.

"Ma'am! Ma'am!"

She turned. "Yes?"

"When will you be back, ma'am?"

"Tomorrow. By noon at the latest."

Stoney tipped his hat and the woman rode off. He'd be all right as long as the man didn't show up when Emma came to bring him his lunch. Knowing Emma, he couldn't tell her about the deal he'd made. Emma would insist on telling the man about the woman. Women just didn't know about business.

A little after noon, not long after Emma had come and gone, as Stoney was cleaning the stalls, Dance shuffled in, his head hung low.

Stoney had been rehearsing different ways to ask the man if he would sell the horse, but hadn't been able to decide on one. But seeing how the man looked, Stoney asked, "Is somethin' wrong?"

"My deal didn't go through. You can't know how much I was counting on it. I'm dead broke." Dance looked up at Stoney then. "Well, almost. I've got the cash to pay you with—and maybe enough left for one decent meal." He shook his head and turned to look at the horse.

Stoney was almost tempted to tell the man about the lady and let him make the best deal he could. Yet he had found the woman, and she had made the deal with him. "People can do their own trading," his father used to say, "but a place of business is a place for them to do it in. And that justifies our profit."

"Well, I might be able to help you," Stoney said.

Dance turned to him, a look of puzzlement on his face.

"This horse of yours is lame and

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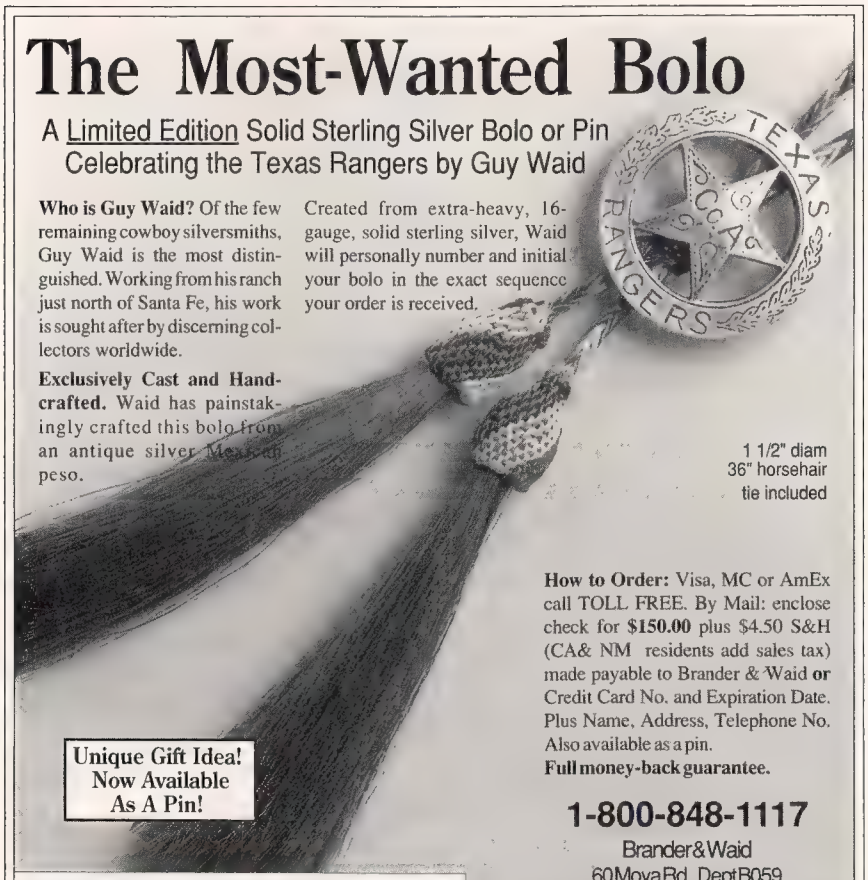

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needs a good rest. If he heals up some, he might be a horse I'd be interested in. Now you're short of hard cash, and I'd be willing to make an offer on him."

The man went to the horse, let it smell his hand, then petted it. "I don't know," he said. "I've grown rather fond of old Isabelle here."

Stoney almost couldn't help himself from laughing. This fellow was so green he'd given his stallion a girl's name.

He had planned on telling the greenhorn that he might use the horse himself for stud. But there was no point if the man didn't even know the difference between a mare and a stallion.

"I could give ya," Stoney hesitated. He was going to say a hundred dollars. But that just didn't seem fair. "Two hundred dollars," Stoney said.

"No. Sorry," the man said, starting to lead the horse out of the stall.

Stoney was so flabbergasted that he had been turned down he just stood there a moment, unable to speak.

"I appreciate your offer, sir," the man said. "But I paid considerably more for him. And I'm sure if I can get back to the man who sold him to me, he'll give me my money back."

"But you'll lame him worse if you ride him!"

"That is true. But the fact is that I can't afford a loss right now. I need a substantial stake to get back on my feet."

"How much did you pay for him?"

"Twelve hundred dollars," the man said, without so much as a blink.

Stoney stood open-mouthed. "But you know," he said after a moment, "the owner might not take him back if you was to ruin his leg. Do you have a spell to go?"

"Well. Yes. It is a ways." The man looked down, kicked some straw with his boot as if thinking.

"If you are still interested, how much do you think you could offer?"

This was no time to try to cut thin, Stoney knew. The banker had confirmed for Emma that the stable and ranch were worth five hundred dollars. If he could get a loan he'd have that. Plus, he had the fifty the woman had given him. "I guess I could offer five fifty," Stoney said.

"That's not very much, considering what I paid for him," the man said, shaking his head.

"That's all I have," Stoney blurted out, not meaning to. It just came out.

A quick look came and went in the man's eyes. Stoney couldn't make sense of it, so he paid it no mind.

"Well," the man said, "I am strapped. And that would help. But then I'd need to buy a horse besides."

"I can give you my horse," Stoney said. "And you can keep your own saddle and such. I don't have no need for that."

That night he told Emma he'd walked the mile to the ranch because his horse was favoring a leg. He could barely sleep, thinking of how surprised Emma would be when he showed her his profit. Stoney hadn't wanted Emma and the woman to meet. When Emma brought him his lunch late the next afternoon as he'd asked her, she found him sitting in the stable, his head hung low, whittling a stick down to nothing.

"Why are you looking that way?" she asked him.

When he didn't answer she looked around the stable for a sign of what was wrong. "Where's your horse?"

"I traded it," he said quietly.

"Traded it for what?" she asked, made anxious by her husband's tone of voice.

"It was going to be a surprise."

"What kind of surprise?" Emma asked carefully. "You don't sound like it could be any that I might be pleased with."

"See that horse?" Stoney said, pointing.

Emma walked over and looked it up and down.

"A woman is coming back to give me a thousand dollars for that horse."

Emma's face broke into a sharp frown.

"When was this woman supposed to be here?"

"Noon. But I reckon she's been held up."

"And all you traded for it was your horse?" Emma asked skeptically.

When Stoney was done with the telling, Emma's face was red with anger. "Stoney Carr," Emma said, "how would that woman know the horse was from Tennessee? You're the one who's been held up."

Leaving Emma at the stable, Stoney went to check at the Nugget. He found out from the bartender that there were no horse ranches anywhere around. Until Emma arrived he had just kept hoping the woman was late. Now, he was angry. Sy Phelps was at a table having a drink, and Stoney asked him if he could borrow a horse.

When he came back to fetch his Colt, Emma saw what was in Stoney's mind and the annoyance left her face. In its place was fright. "Now, wait," Emma said. "It isn't the end of the world. I know what you've a mind to do, but you aren't going after them." Still Stoney headed for his holster. Emma jumped in front of him, barring the way.

He picked her up and moved her out of the way. As he strapped on the belt, she stood in front of him.

"So you were cheated. There's a marshal to take care of that. You don't need to go out and get yourself killed over it."

"The marshal's got a lot to worry him besides some fool sta-

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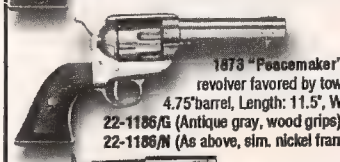

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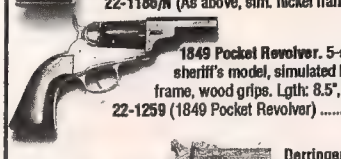

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ble man who got cheated. If I don't get that money back before they spend it, I may never get it."

Tears ran from Emma's eyes but her face was flushed with anger. "It's only money. We can lose that. What I don't want to lose is you."

Emma didn't know they'd been robbed of everything they had. She didn't need to know. Though her tears softened him, Stoney had to pay her no mind. A man had to do for himself, or he wasn't a man anybody would respect.

What he didn't know was that as he rode out of town, Emma was borrowing a horse to follow him.

In Pride a cowboy directed him to the Oxford Saloon as soon as he had described the woman. It was late afternoon and the hitching post outside had only two horses tied to it. Stoney tied his horse and the lame stallion to the rail, then went and pushed open the swinging doors.

Two cowboys stood by the bar drinking. Stoney couldn't see well in the gloom that filled the edges of the room.

Suddenly a familiar Irish voice called from the darkness. "You looking for me?" As Stoney turned his head to look a gun barrel flashed. There was another flash as Stoney fell backwards, out the door.

Emma had arrived in time to find him hit bad and lying on the boardwalk. It was she who got the doctor. The men gathering around had been so sure Stoney was soon dead that they hadn't bothered calling him. According to an onlooker, a man and the woman who had shot Stoney had hightailed it out of town.

Emma took Stoney home. She had borrowed the money from her aunt to deal with the bank loan and pay a man to run the stable. She had started gathering the horses that had been the start of their business.

The one bullet that had hit him had gouged his backbone. Stoney had to stay in bed the longest time, without moving, or else he might never move again, the doc said. At first the anger in him had been like a branding iron burning in his craw. Every night Emma had come to his bedside, saying the stallion had been a good buy after all. And that the fine line that she was starting now was such that no one else would have horses the likes of theirs. He had seen the foals when he was first able to get around. They were beautiful and though they were shorter, Stoney saw the stallion in them. Just weeks before he was able to get up out of bed, however, the stallion had badly hurt his leg and had to be shot. By the time he was up and around, Emma had convinced him that there was no point in revenge. They had done him a favor. Besides, it was the woman, not the man, who had shot Stoney, and a man didn't go gunning for a woman.

The lamp was on in the kitchen. Emma's fingers were powdered with fresh flour and there was a finger-shaped spot of it on her cheek. The warm oven pushed the smell of baked apples and cinnamon at him. Stoney's voice was shaking. "Did you lie to me, woman?"

"Lie about what?" Emma said, her smile not completely leaving her face.

"About the stallion?" He found it hard to hold on to his anger. Though he had never been able to stay mad at Emma long, this was something serious. "Why did you lead me to believe it sired all those foals?"

Emma studied the man she'd loved for over thirty years. "Love," Emma said. "Wild love. Where do you think I got the name for the ranch?"

Stoney just looked at her. Was she mocking him? The look on her face told him no.

"You didn't bring that trouble entirely on yourself with that fancy horse. I know I was spending too much on things for the house, and I was wrong to do it. That's what gave you the need, and I've blamed only myself for it. But you were the one who had to go and take the law into your own hands, nearly getting yourself killed in the process."

"I couldn't let that man cheat me," Stoney said, not surprised to find that she had put him on the defensive.

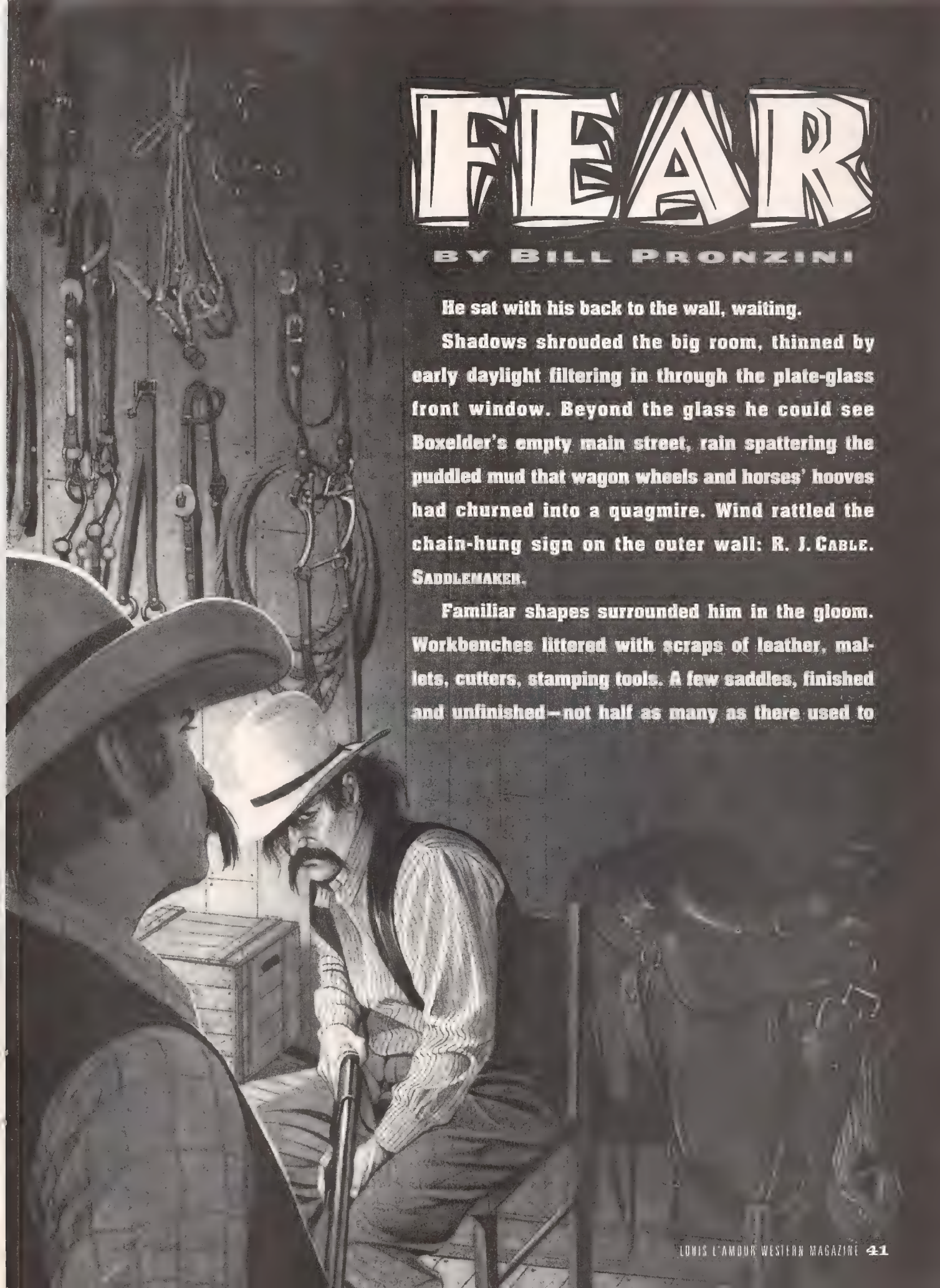
"You tried to cheat him. That's how it all started. But I knew you wouldn't let it go at that. That's why I let you believe what I did. I knew otherwise you'd go after them again. It was them that got us started raising what's turned out to be the finest herd of horses anywhere around. I just let you think that they helped a mite more than they rightly did."

"But you lied!"

"I did not lie. I told you I had that horse brought here and it was. I told you I bred stock and I did. I told you I shot that horse and I did. I just didn't rightly allow you to understand the order of things."

Stoney couldn't speak.

"That horse never would have made good blood for a line. It had no last to it." She began putting plates on the table as she talked. "They'd bred in thin legs and short wind for a quick race. I found us good mountain stock. The best. I just got us by. But, you see, I always had a good eye for stock. You're strong, you've got sand, and the reason we're as well off now as we are is you're probably the best horse trader this side of the Mississippi." Emma wiped her hands on a cloth. "Well, don't just stand there gawking. Clean up. Dinner's ready."



FEAR

BY BILL PRONZINI

He sat with his back to the wall, waiting.

Shadows shrouded the big room, thinned by early daylight filtering in through the plate-glass front window. Beyond the glass he could see Boxelder's empty main street, rain spattering the puddled mud that wagon wheels and horses' hooves had churned into a quagmire. Wind rattled the chain-hung sign on the outer wall: R. J. Cable. Saddlemaker.

Familiar shapes surrounded him in the gloom. Workbenches littered with scraps of leather, mallets, cutters, stamping tools. A few saddles, finished and unfinished—not half as many as there used to

be. Wall racks hung with bridles and hackamores, saddlebags and other accessories. Once the tools and accomplishments of his trade had given him pleasure, comfort, a measure of peace. Not anymore. Even the good odors of new leather and beeswax and harness oil had soured in his nostrils.

It was cold in the shop; he hadn't bothered to lay a fire when he had come in at dawn, after another sleepless night. But he took little notice of the chill. He had been cold for a long while now, the kind of gut-cold that no fire can ever thaw.

His hands, twisted together in his lap, were sweating.

He glanced over at the closed door to the storeroom. A seed company calendar was tacked to it—not that he needed a calendar to tell him what day this was. October 26, 1892. The day after Lee Tarbeaux was scheduled to be released from Deer Lodge Prison. The day Tarbeaux would return to Boxelder after eight long years.

Tarbeaux had been sorry to hear that Kendall was dead now, weeks after it had happened, on the prison grapevine.

The day Tarbeaux had vowed to end Reed Cable's life.

His gaze lingered on the storeroom door a few seconds longer. The shotgun was back there—his father's old double-barreled Remington that he'd brought from home yesterday—propped in a corner, waiting as he was. He thought about fetching it, setting it next to his stool. But there was no need yet. It was still early.

He scrubbed his damp palms on his Levi's, then fumbled in a vest pocket for his turnip watch. He flipped the dustcover, held the dial up close to his eyes. Ten after seven.

How long before Tarbeaux came?

Noon at the earliest; there were a lot of miles between here and Deer Lodge. If he could work, it would make the time go by more quickly . . . but he couldn't. His hands were too unsteady for leathercraft. It would be an effort to keep them steady enough to hold the shotgun when the time came.

A few more hours, he told himself. Just a few more hours. Then it'll finally be over.

He sat watching the rainswept street. Waiting.

It was a quarter past twelve when Lee Tarbeaux reached the outskirts of Boxelder. The town had grown substantially since he'd been away—even more than he'd expected. There were more farms and small ranches in the area, too—parcels deeded off to homesteaders where once there had been nothing but rolling Montana grassland. Everything changes, sooner or later, he thought as he rode. Land, towns, and men, too. Some men.

He passed the cattle pens near the railroad depot, deserted now in the misty rain. He'd spent many a day there when he had worked for Old Man Kendall—and one day in particular that he'd never forget, because it had been the beginning of the end of his freedom for eight long years.

Kendall was dead now; died in his sleep in 'eighty-nine. Tarbeaux had been sorry to hear it, weeks after it had happened, on the prison grapevine. He'd held no hard feelings toward the old cowman or his son Bob. The Kendalls were no different from the rest of the people here; they'd believed Cable's lies and that there was a streak of larceny in Tarbeaux's kid-wildness. You couldn't blame them for feeling betrayed. Only one man to blame and that was Reed Cable.

Tarbeaux rode slowly, savoring the chill October air with its foretaste of winter snow. The weather didn't bother him and it didn't seem to bother the spavined blue roan he'd bought cheap from a hostler in the town of Deer Lodge—something of a surprise, given the animal's age and condition. Just went to show that you couldn't always be sure about anybody or anything, good or bad. Except Reed Cable. Tarbeaux was sure Cable was the same man he'd been eight years ago. Bits and pieces of information that had filtered through the prison walls added weight to his certainty.

Some of the buildings flanking Montana Street were familiar: the Boxelder Hotel, the sprawling bulk of Steinmetz Brewery. Many others were not. It gave him an odd, uncomfortable feeling to know this town and yet not know it—to be home and yet to understand that it could never be home again. He wouldn't stay long. Not even the night. And once he left, he'd never come back. Boxelder, like Deer Lodge, like all his foolish kid plans, were part of a past he had to bury completely if he was to have any kind of future.

A chain-hung shingle, dancing in the wind, appeared in the gray mist ahead: R. J. CABLE. SADDLEMAKER. The plate-glass window below the sign showed a rectangle of lamplight, even though there was a "closed" sign in one corner.

Tarbeaux barely glanced at the window as he passed, with no effort to see through the water-pocked glass. There was plenty of time. Patience was just one of the things his stay in the penitentiary had taught him. Besides, he was hungry. It had been hours since his meager trailside breakfast.

He tied the roan to a hitch rail in front of an eatery called the Elite Cafe. It was one of the new places; no one there knew or recognized him. He ordered hot coffee and a bowl of chili. And as he ate, he thought about the things that drive a man, that shape and change him for better or worse. Greed was one. Hate was another. He knew all about hate; he'd lived with it a long time. But it wasn't the worst of the ones that ate the guts right out of a man.

The worst was fear.

When Cable saw the lone, slicker-clad figure ride by outside, he knew it was Lee Tarbeaux. Even without a clear look at the man's face, shielded by the tilt of a rain hat, he knew. He felt a taut relief. It wouldn't be much longer now.

He extended a hand to the shotgun propped beside his stool. He'd brought it out of the storeroom two hours ago, placed it within easy reach. The sick feeling inside him grew and spread as he rested the weapon across his knees. His damp palms made the metal surfaces feel greasy. He kept his hands on it just the same.

His thoughts drifted as he sat there, went back again, as they so often did these days, to the spring of 'eighty-four. Twenty years old that spring, him and Lee Tarbeaux both. Friendly enough because they'd grown up together, both of them town kids, but not close friends. Too little in common. Too much spirit in Tarbeaux and not enough spirit in him. Lee went places and did things he was too timid to join in on.

Tarbeaux had always had a reckless streak and it had widened out, thanks to a similar streak in Old Man Kendall's son Bob.

When Tarbeaux turned eighteen he'd gone to work as a hand on Old Man Kendall's K-Bar Ranch. He'd always had a reckless streak and it had widened out over the following two years, thanks to a similar streak in Old Man Kendall's son Bob. Drinking, whoring, a few saloon fights. No serious trouble with the law, but enough trouble to make the law aware of Lee Tarbeaux.

Not a whisper of wildness in Reed Cable, meanwhile. Quiet and steady—that was what everyone said about him. Quiet and steady and honest. He took a position as night clerk at the Boxelder Hotel. Not because he wanted the job; saddlemaking and leather work were what he craved to do with his life. But there were two saddlemakers in town already, and neither was interested in hiring an apprentice. He'd have moved to another town except that his ma, who'd supported them since his father's death, had taken sick and was no longer able to work as a seamstress. All up to him then. And the only decent job he could find was the night clerk's.

Ma'd died in March of that year. One month after Tarbeaux's aunt—the last of his relatives—passed away. And on a day in late April Bob Kendall and Lee Tarbeaux and the rest of the K-Bar crew drove their roundup beeves in to the railroad loading pens. Old Man Kendall wasn't with them; he'd been laid up with gout. Bob Kendall was in charge, but he was a hammerhead as well as half wild: liquor and women and stud poker were all he cared about. Tarbeaux was with him when the cattle buyer from Billings finished his tally and paid off in cash. Seventy-four hundred dollars, all in greenbacks.

It was after bank closing hours by the time the deal was done. Bob Kendall hadn't cared to go hunting Banker Weems to take charge of the money. He wanted a running start on his night's fun, so he turned the chore over to Lee. Tarbeaux made a halfhearted attempt to find the banker, and then his own itch got the best of him. He went to the hotel, where his old friend Reed had just come on shift, where the lobby was otherwise deserted, and laid the saddlebags full of money on the counter.

"Reed," he said without explanation, "do me a favor and put these bags in the hotel safe for tonight. I or Bob Kendall'll be back to fetch 'em first thing in the morning."

It was curiosity that made him open the bags after Tarbeaux left. The sight of all that cash weakened his knees, dried his mouth. He put the saddlebags away in the safe, but he couldn't stop thinking about the money. So many things he could do with it, so many ambitions he could make a reality. A boldness and a recklessness built in him for the first time. The money grew from a lure into a consuming obsession as the hours passed. He might've been able to overcome it if his mother had still been alive, but he was all alone—with no prospects for the

Tarbeaux had promised himself that when he got out of prison he'd make his remaining years pass as slowly as he could.

future and no one to answer to but himself.

He took the saddlebags from the safe an hour past midnight. Took them out back of the hotel stables and hid them in a clump of buck brush. Afterward he barely remembered doing it, as if it had all happened in a dream.

Bob Kendall came in alone at eight in the morning, hung over and in mean spirits, just as the day clerk arrived to serve as a witness. There was a storm inside Reed Cable, but outwardly he was calm. Saddlebags? He didn't know anything about saddlebags full of money. Tarbeaux hadn't been in last evening, no matter what he claimed. He hadn't seen Lee in more than two weeks.

In a fury Bob Kendall ran straight to the sheriff, and the sheriff arrested Tarbeaux. The hardest part of the whole thing was facing Lee, repeating the lies, and watching the outraged disbelief in Tarbeaux's eyes turn to blind hate. But the money was all he let himself think about. The money, the money, the money. . . .

It was his word against Tarbeaux's, his reputation against Tarbeaux's. The sheriff believed him, the Kendalls believed him, the townspeople believed him —and the judge and jury believed him. The verdict was guilty, the sentence a minimum of eight years at hard labor.

Tarbeaux had made his vow of vengeance as he was being led from the courtroom. "You won't get away with this, Reed!" he yelled. "You'll pay and pay dear. As soon as I get out I'll come back and make sure you pay!"

The threat had shaken Cable at the time. But neither it nor his conscience had bothered him for long. Tarbeaux's release from Deer Lodge was in the far future; why worry about it? He had the money, he had his plans—and when one of the town's two saddlemakers died suddenly of a stroke, he soon realized the first of his ambitions.

Cable shifted position on the hard stool. That was then and this was now, he thought bitterly. The far future had become the present. Pain moved through his belly and chest; a dry cough racked him. He sleeved sweat from his eyes, peered again through the front window. A few pedestrians hurried by on the wet sidewalk; none was Lee Tarbeaux.

"Come on," he said aloud. "Come on, damn you, and get it over with!"

Tarbeaux finished his meal, took out the makings, and rolled a smoke to savor with a final cup of coffee. Food, coffee, tobacco—it all tasted good again, now that he was free. He'd rushed through the first twenty years of his life, taking everything for granted. And he'd struggled and pained his way through the last eight, taking nothing for granted. He'd promised himself that when he got out he'd make his remaining years pass as slowly as he could, that he'd take the time to look and feel and learn, and that he'd cherish every minute of every new day.

He paid his bill, crossed the street to Adams Mercantile—another new business run by a stranger—and replenished his supplies of food and tobacco. That left him with just three dollars of his prison savings. He'd have to settle someplace soon, at least long enough to take a job and build himself a stake. After that . . . no hurry, wherever he went and whatever he did. No hurry at all.

First things first, though. The time had come to face Reed Cable.

He felt nothing as he walked upstreet to where the chain-hung sign rattled and danced. It had all been worked out in his mind long ago. All that was left was the settlement.

Lamplight still burned behind the saddlery's window. Without looking through the glass, without hesitation, Tarbeaux opened the door and went in under a tinkling bell.

Cable sat on a stool at the back wall, an old double-barreled shotgun across his knees. He didn't move as Tarbeaux shut the door behind him. In the pale lamp glow Cable seemed small and shrunken. His sweat-stained skin was sallow, pinched, and his hands trembled. He'd aged twenty years in the past eight—an old man before his thirtieth birthday.

The shotgun surprised Tarbeaux a little. He hadn't figured on a willingness in Cable to put up a fight. He said as he took off his rain hat, "Expecting me, I see."

"I knew you'd come. You haven't changed much, Lee."

"Sure I have. On the inside. Just the opposite with you."

"You think so?"

"I know so. You fixing to shoot me with that scattergun?"

"If you try anything I will."

"I'm not armed."

"Expect me to believe that?"

Tarbeaux shrugged and glanced slowly around the shadowed room. "Pretty fair leather work," he said. "Seems you were cut out to be a saddlemaker, like you always claimed."

"Man's got to do something."

"That's a fact. Only thing is, he ought to do it with honest money."

"All right," Cable said.

"You admitting you stole the K-Bar money, Reed? No more lies?"

"Not much point in lying to you."

"How about the sheriff and Bob Kendall? Ready to tell them the truth, too—get it all off your chest?"

Cable shook his head. "It's too late for that."

"Why?"

"I couldn't face prison, that's why. I couldn't stand it."

"I stood it for eight years," Tarbeaux said. "It's not so bad, once you get used to it."

"No. I couldn't, not even for a year."

"Man can be in prison even when there's no bars on his windows."

Cable made no reply.

"What I mean, it's been a hard eight years for you, too. Harder, I'll warrant, than the ones I lived through. Isn't that so?"

Still no reply.

"It's so," Tarbeaux said. "You got yourself this shop and you learned to be a saddlemaker. But then it all slid downhill from there. Starting with Clara Weems. You always talked about marrying her someday, having three or four kids—your other big ambition. But she turned you down when you asked for her hand. Married that storekeeper in Billings, instead."

The words made Cable's hands twitch on the shotgun. "How'd you know that?"

"I know plenty about you, Reed. You proposed to two other women; they wouldn't have you, either. Then you lost four thousand dol-

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lars on bad mining stock. Then one of your horses kicked over a lantern and burned down your barn and half your house. Then you caught consumption and were laid up six months during the winter of 'ninety and 'ninety-one—"

"That's enough," Cable said, but there was no heat in his voice. Only a kind of desperate weariness.

"No, it's not. Your health's been poor ever since, worsening steadily, and there's nothing much the sawbones can do about it. How much more time do they give you—four years? Five?"

"Addled, whoever told you that. I'm healthy enough. I've got a long life ahead of me."

"Four years—five, at the most. *I'm* the one with the long life ahead. And I aim to make it a good life. You remember how I could barely read and write? Well, I learned in prison and now I can do both better than most. I learned a trade, too. Blacksmithing. One of these days I'll have my own shop, same as you, with my name on a sign out front bigger than yours."

"But first you had to stop here and settle with me."

"That's right. First I have to settle with you."

"Kill me, like you swore in court you'd do. Shoot me dead."

"I never swore that."

"Same as."

"You think I still hate you that much?"

"Don't you?"

"No," Tarbeaux said. "Not anymore."

"I don't believe that. You're lying."

"You're the liar, Reed, not me."

"You want me dead. Admit it—you want me dead."

"You'll be dead in four or five years."

"You can't stand to wait that long. You want me dead here and now."

"No. All I ever wanted was to make sure you paid for what you did to me. Well, you're paying and paying dear. I came here to tell you to your face that I know you are. That's the only reason I came, the only settlement I'm after."

"You bastard, don't fool with me. Draw your gun and get it over with."

"I told you, I'm not armed."

Cable jerked the scattergun off his knees, a gesture that was meant to be provoking. But the muzzle wobbled at a point halfway between them, held there. "Make your play!"

Tarbeaux understood then. There was no fight in Cable; there never had been. There was only fear. He said, "You're trying to *make* me kill you. That's it, isn't it? You want me to put you out of your misery."

It was as if he'd slapped Cable

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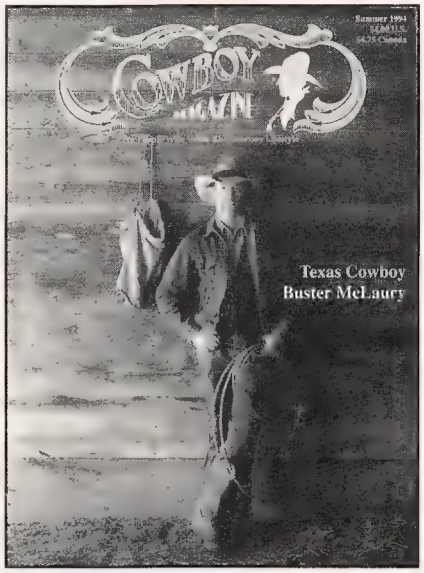

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across the face. Cable's head jerked; he lurched to his feet, swinging the Remington until its twin muzzles were like eyes centered on Tarbeaux's face.

Tarbeaux stood motionless. "You can't stand the thought of living another five sick, hurting years, but you don't have the guts to kill yourself. You figured you could goad me into doing it for you."

"No. Make your play or I'll blow your goddamn head off!"

"Not with that scattergun. It's not loaded, Reed. We both know that now."

Cable tried to stare him down. The effort lasted no more than a few seconds; his gaze slid down to the useless shotgun. Then, as if the weight of the weapon was too much for his shaking hands, he let it fall to the floor, kicked it clattering under one of the workbenches.

"Why?" he said in a thin, hollow whisper. "Why couldn't you do what you vowed you'd do? Why couldn't you finish it?"

"It is finished," Tarbeaux said.

And it was, in every way. Now he really was free—of Cable and the last of his hate, of the past. Now he could start living again.

He turned and went out into the cold, sweet rain.

Cable slumped again onto his stool. Tarbeaux's last words seemed to hang like a frozen echo in the empty room.

It is finished.

For Tarbeaux, maybe it was. Not for Reed Cable. It wouldn't be finished for him for a long, long time.

"Damn you," he said, and then shouted the words. "Damn you!" But they weren't meant for Lee Tarbeaux this time. They were meant for himself.

He kept on sitting there with his back to the wall.

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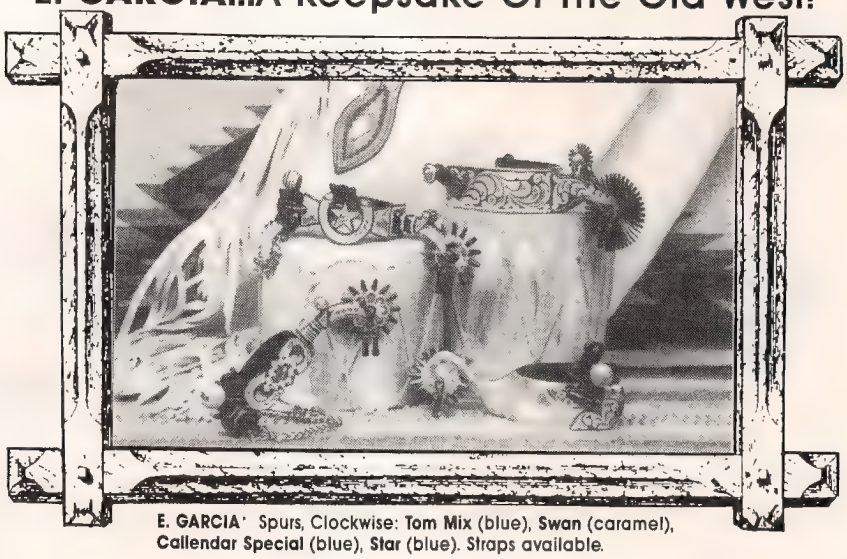

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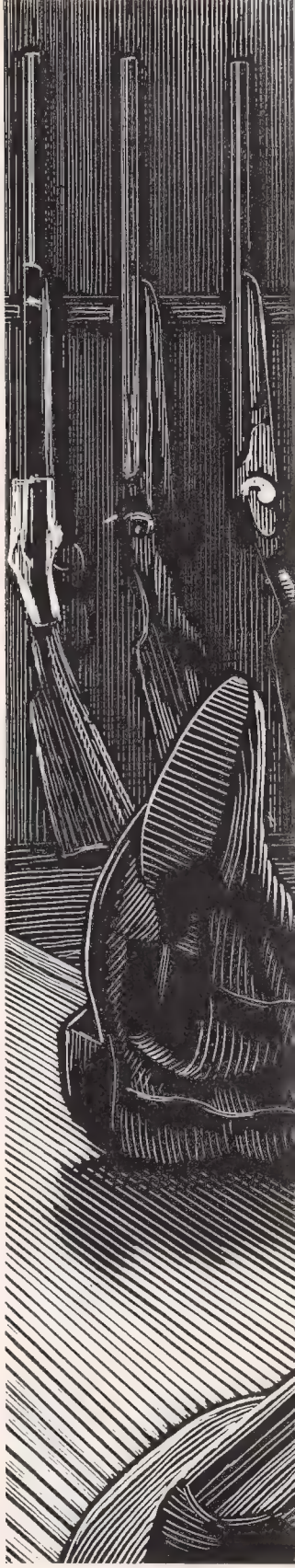


Sheriff Ben Davidson had pulled out on the train to Bozeman yesterday morning at seven, which pretty much left his office to me for the space of four or five days. Not that much happens in Sand Flat. The Indian wars that had left my own ma and pa lying dead and the small ranch they had called home a gutted ruin of windy coals were ten years behind us. There were some bad men in the West then. I had seen really bad men who would as quick pull a trigger as spit, but not hardly around Sand Flat. Nothing much to draw them here.

Sand Flat awakened, slept, and in between simply endured this furnace-hot summer of 1886, while the fields browned, a few listless cattle grew gaunt, and the occasional passerby dropped a few dollars at the Mercantile or at Smiley's Crystal Parlor. That was his real name, Smiley. And there wasn't much crystal about his saloon that I knew of save for the bar.

The town was so small a horse had to pause and sniff around some to know he'd been there. Still, it was an old town as the West went. It was supposed to have had a railroad

ILLUSTRATION BY KELLY MADDOX

by

John H. Timmerman

Ben had been riding cavalry, chasing Cheyenne across the hills, when he had come across our burned out ranch.

spur for cattle once, and when the spur didn't come the town was supposed to die off, but it didn't. Why anyone would have wanted to run a spur to Sand Flat in the first place is beyond me. It was a right pretty town, with large cottonwoods on the main street and a small river that sluiced through the town with sometimes enough water that a sprinkler wagon rode down Main Street and settled the dust. People grew to like it and simply and stubbornly stayed on. And they did all right, I guess—especially Orison's Mercantile. Well enough, anyway, to have a schoolhouse built a half dozen years ago that I went to for a spell—long enough to learn to write my name, which is as much as my pa could do before the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers got him. Doesn't take much schooling to shoot a Colt's .38 straight, which is my sole aim in life, so to speak.

Strangers passed through—drummers, prospectors heading to the mountains behind the Blue Pines, government men, occasional soldiers, now and then some raggedy Cheyenne. There were ranches east and south that sent their cowboys hooting down to Smiley's place on the first of the month. Once in a while there was a plains hard case lured up north by whatever little was here or running from what was down there. Enough such to need a sheriff. One such hard case had been shot dead by Ben little more than a year ago. The man had worked hard at the bottle for three or four hours at Smiley's, then staggered to the north end of town where some available half-breed ladies worked. The screams brought Ben on a run. The hard case had sliced up his woman with a Green River knife and pulled a gun on Ben. No discussion about that. Ben's shot hit him just under the left eye and tore half his face away.

I had my feet propped up on the sheriff's desk and was stretched back in the swivel chair, kind of hunched on my lower back the way I'd seen Ben maybe a thousand or more times.

I'd guess my shoulders were pretty near as broad as Ben's, seeing I stand six feet and pack close to a hundred and eighty pounds into it, but I couldn't get the easy slump of the chair so that it came natural. My hind end slid down when I laced my hands behind my head and my legs began to fall asleep and go numb. Still, I held there talking as easy as talk could be in the blistering August heat of Sand Flat to June May, who had stopped by on her way to her father's mercantile.

June May held a small basket covered by a red-checkered cloth that I guessed held her father's lunch. Each day at noon she walked from their house around the corner to the mercantile. What made her stop in and see me, I'll never know, except maybe she finally figured out that I'd had a shine on her for nearly two years. It was pretty much hopeless, I'll admit, me being a nearly schoolless kid and she about ready to go to Bozeman next year to become a teacher herself. But that never bothered too many hot-blooded bodies so far as I know.

One thing Sheriff Davidson had taught me these last ten years was to hope and hold your head high until that hope was answered. Ben had been riding cavalry that autumn of 1877 under Colonel Carlton, chasing Dull Knife's doomed Cheyenne across the flats and hills near the Niabrora, when they came across our burned-out ranch. I don't remember that time as anything more than a dull, red blur. I was eight then. Ben had taken me back to Fort Robinson, and when it was all over he took me north with him to Sand Flat and took me as his own. Although I've never called him more than Sheriff, he's been like a pa to me.

The pity of the matter is that Mrs. Davidson had begged me to call her Mother since the day I walked in, that winter of 1877. And I did, too, when Ben was gone. I wish now I had more, for she was a sick woman—had been for more than four years—and she knew as well as Ben and me that she was dying. I believe I would do about anything for those two who had been ma and pa to me. There was never money. It all went into medicine and doctors and I knew there were a lot more bills than money to pay for them. There was talk of an operation in Bozeman, but that was so impossible as to be beyond hope. All a man could do, Ben said. Said he learned it the hard way. From Dull Knife and his Cheyenne. I'm not sure I understand; that seemed more like blind despair to me.

Those were the things I had been thinking when June May walked in.

"Hi, Matthew," she said. "Almost lunchtime."

"Hello, June May." I tried to act nonchalant and slink down in Ben's chair, although my spine

felt it had fire in it and my legs were as dull as a month-old cow pie.

"Too hot to eat. Figured someone would bring me lunch in a basket."

She chuckled. She had a deep voice for such a fine, light body, and her laugh always stirred me some.

"Now that you're deputy," she said, pointing at my vest, "maybe I should."

I sat up like a bolt, knocked the blotter off the desk with my leaden legs, and nearly fell out of the chair. That's right. I had taken the star that Ben had promised me on my twenty-first birthday from the drawer and pinned it on my shirt. Well, it was there now. I felt a hot flush creep up my cheeks.

"Well," I drawled out, "with the sheriff gone, someone's got to watch out for you pretty young ladies." How I managed to get that mouthful of words out was beyond me. The nice thing about June May, though, was that she may put a fellow off, but she never put him down. Sort of reminds me of the time an English journalist stopped at Smiley's Crystal Parlor once, walked up to old Smiley, who was a big ugly ox of a man, and said, "Beg your pardon, please. Is your master here?"

"That son of a wall-eyed buffler cow ain't been born yet," Smiley replied.

The story made the rounds for a long time, and Smiley's trade doubled just to hear it.

June May didn't use words like that.

"Tell you what, Deputy Matt Davidson," she said. She called me by Ben's name, as everyone did. "I'll come back with a sandwich." She said it with a smile as sweet as a spring rain down off the Blue Pine Mountains.

I forgot playing deputy and said quickly, "You got yourself a date, June May."

She smiled and let herself out the door. I'm still not sure what made her stop by. Probably finally took an interest in me, but it didn't take me more than half a second to bolt to the window and watch her sashay down the street—the one bright spot in that whole dusty town.

Her blue cotton smock was a bit of bright light scattering happily up Main Street. And beyond. Rolling past Ben's house at the edge of the river. Rolling past the river and the shimmering sun-skewered plains, clean on up to the cool rise of the rugged Blue Pine foothills in the distance, where I would like to be taking her.

I was still watching her when the shotgun boomed out a muffled roar that clapped around the quiet street like a strangled cry. A figure lurched out of Orison's Mercantile, geared crazily to his horse, and whirled westward. He used the saddlebag in his hand to slap the horse's pumping rear and the startled critter bolted down the street in a cloud of dust. Only a desperate man would treat an animal like that in this heat, I thought. Then I remembered the blast of the shotgun.

June May spun in a cloud of dust, then was running to the Mercantile. As she reached the door, her father staggered through. He raised his arm so that the blood was a clear dark stain across the chest of his white shirt, pooling down so that it turned dirty red while I watched. He made as if to shout something, then pitched forward into June May's arms and bore her to the dusty street.

This I caught out of the tail of my eye as I jumped across the office, pulled a Colt's .38 from the desk that I had practiced with and as much as called mine, and grabbed a holster and belt of cartridges from the rack. The gun flapped against my leg as I tried to buckle the holster. I was out on the street in a flash, literally. I tumbled through the door, tripped while fumbling with the gun belt, and sprawled headlong in the street. I slapped my hat back on and ran to the Mercantile.

Only Smiley was in the street; the others were holding back behind closed doors. Who knows how long they would have waited. I knelt by Mr. Orison, turned him over, felt the limp flesh flop like an old fish in my hands, and nearly vomited when I saw the hole in his chest. It's a wonder he made it to the door.

A figure lurched out of Orison's Mercantile, geared crazily to his horse, and whirled westward, slapping his horse's rear.

One quick look inside told most of the story. The high iron safe in which Orison kept not only his own considerable profits, but also the safekeepings of half a dozen others, stood open. Orison must have gone for the shotgun. The counter knocked askew, with dry goods littering the floor, told of the struggle. The hole in Orison's chest gave the conclusion.

Six or eight men had since rushed into the store.

"I'm going after him," I said. "Who'll make a posse with me?"

Not a man moved.

"Wait for the sheriff, Matt," said Jonas Rountree, Sand Flat's druggist and the closest thing we had to a medical man.

"Wait!" I exploded. "If we go now, we stand a fair chance of closing on him. Sheriff isn't due back till Friday."

"Knock it off, Matt," said Smiley. "And what are you doing with that badge on? You're nothing but a green kid."

I looked down at the badge and felt a flush of embarrassment. "Kid or nothing," I said, "I'm going."

June May sat slumped in the corner, her face a veil of pain cut through by tears. I walked over to her.

"June May," I said, "I'm going to get the man who did that. I'll bring him back."

She nodded dumbly. Her eyes turned to me. She reached out her hand and held to mine. "Get him, Matt," she said.

"I will. Believe me, I will."

I helped myself to a few staples from the shelves, thrust them in a sack, and left for my horse. I muttered to Smiley on the way out, "Write it up to the sheriff's office."

On the way to the livery I crossed through the sheriff's office, took a Spenser and a box of cartridges out of the case. Ben had a big, deep-chested gelding at the stable. I was half tempted to take him, but thought better of it and saddled my sorrel, Ginny. She was a feisty little mustang with more guts than sense. But she held still while I fumbled with the cinches and bridle. I tossed a few scoops of oats in a bag and tied them, along with my supplies and two full canteens, to the saddle.

I was down the street and crossing the river bridge when I remembered Ma Davidson. Ginny was just getting a nose for the flats and I had to rein her hard to turn back. Far ahead I could see a little dust spiral edging toward the Blue Pines. Whoever it was must have known Ben would be out of town. Pure chance? How then the knowledge that Orison's Mercantile held half the little wealth that Sand Flat possessed?

Ma Davidson was propped up in bed, pretty much the way I'd left her that morning.

"I heard a shot, Matthew," she said.

"Someone robbed the Mercantile. Shot Orison."

The Cheyenne Dog Soldiers could tell more from a horse dropping than half a dozen pairs of field glasses.

"Dead?"

"Dead."

"And Ben's gone." Her voice was plaintive. "You're not going, Matthew? That badge . . ."

"I'm going, Ma. Someone has to." Even though it was scorching hot, Ma had a thin sheet pulled up around her. Through the sheet I could see the way her left side bulged a bit. The lump rose nearly to her neck. I looked back to her eyes and saw they were steeled against pain. Yet she smiled.

"There's no one else will go, Ma, until Ben gets back."

"Matthew. Be careful."

I bent and kissed her. The first time I ever had. She smelled sick.

* * *

I held Ginny to a lope. I'd be careful, all right. But Ben Davidson had taught me more about tracking and observing and using whatever wits I'd been born with than any man alive. He once said the Cheyenne had left me with that when they took my folks. There were no better trackers in the world than Cheyenne Dog Soldiers. They could tell more from a horse dropping or insect feet in a hoofprint than half a dozen pairs of field glasses. It told me right now to hold Ginny back. She would have run herself dizzy out there on the prairie if I'd let her, and probably run me straight into that murderer's ambush. I could no longer see even a dust rise, but the hoofprints were as clear as one of them newfangled photographs. Over there I could tell he had reined his horse from a gallop to a lope. High time, too. He knew something about Montana weather. Montana was never good cattle country. The blue cold of fifty below in winter would freeze a cow as stiff as a pole, and in summer, on the plains, the sun fried their brains like scrambled eggs. It was loco country. Ginny was lathered already at a lope. The hot wind cut into my sweat-soaked clothes, drying them like stiff leather. Her hooves kept the steady beat she could hold for hours, even under this sun.

Riding unraveled my mind like it always did; and like usual it unraveled on June May. I saw her tear-soaked face and renewed my promise.

"Think of the trial," I heard Ben saying in my mind, and I did. I traced the figure of the murderer from the brief glimpse I'd had of him. What was unusual about him? Same dirty jeans, cotton shirt, and tan vest as a thousand wanderers. The horse was a black; large—a good pacer, it looked like, capable of many miles. Too high to be a mustang. Hadn't seen

it before. Ah, this. The man had a red beard. That was unusual. His hat was down low and I couldn't recall seeing his hair, but there was the flash of red beard. No mask. And his skin was dark —like an Indian's, almost.

I'd had such a quick glance I had to caution myself against dreaming in features that weren't there. "Observe," Ben would say. "Be patient. Let it add up on its own account."

I rode into the yellow eye of the sun across a plain shimmering with mirage.

Ginny plugged along at a good pace for a couple of hours before her chest began to heave. At mid-afternoon, shade was scarcer than hen's teeth, but we stopped for a few minutes so I could wet her lips and nostrils from the canteen and let us catch our breath. She stuck her big rubbery lips out as if to swallow the whole canteen. To sit down would scorch a blister on my hindquarters like a brand so I stood there, eyeing the distant and scarcely larger rim of the Blue Pines. I knew I would make them toward evening, but I saw nothing of the man I chased save maybe a tiny black dot shimmering through a mirage. It was then that I began to think that maybe I was nothing more than a crazy, half-cocked kid.

Still, I had hunted in the Blue Pines more times than I could count and probably knew them better than any man alive. Whoever that was up ahead, I figured, either knew full well that Sheriff Davidson was out of town or he had just happened to pick the luckiest day of his life. Not so lucky for June May's pa, though. That made him guilty of murder, and I was going to bring him in to hang. That's a bit sobering. I was up against a killer. I told myself that I had worked hard, that my muscles were as tough as the next man's, and that while my draw wouldn't ever amount to much, I could shoot about as straight as most any man and a whole lot better than some. I rattled off a string of cuss words to toughen my spirit and got back astride Ginny. She was ready to go again. Straight now to the Blue Pines. One thing I did have, I told myself. That was the best teacher around in Ben Davidson. Use your head, he'd say. And then keep hoping.

I was surprised to see the scattered shale and loose rock where the rider had spurred his mount straight up a ridge.

This I thought about—whoever it was up ahead had killed in cold blood. There had been a struggle, sure, but a man was dead. The man I was following wasn't likely to walk up to me, fall on his knees, and beg to be taken in. More likely it would be my shot against his. I had to think of that.

Shooting straight was a gift of the eye, not one of practice. Someone with poor eyesight could practice through target after target and still not be half so good as a slow moving, uncoordinated cuss with the gift of keen vision. That gift I had, and had added to it with the help of Ben, who was no slouch, either, but who knew full well I could beat him plinking cans nine times out of ten. I could pretty much see the slug hit the can, which isn't an exaggeration. Ben had taught me the art that goes with the gift—how to slow your heartbeat by quiet half-breaths even though your mind is racing, how to squeeze the trigger like a piece of fruit even though your muscles are bunched with nerves. It became second nature. I was wondering now if I could do it if I had to draw on this man I was chasing.

I thought of my promise to June May. "I'll bring him back"—is that what I had said?

I was thinking about that while the sun screamed like a white bird in the sky. There was no need to hold Ginny in now; she was in a white lather and hardly moving. When she snorted she threw white clots of lather on my own sweat-soaked arms. I couldn't see any figure ahead—could hardly see the Blue Pines through the shimmer of heat. But I tugged the reins when I saw that odd red thing cast off into a clump of dried, scrubby brush. I stopped to look at it, then had to climb down and sit a spell to puzzle it out.

The thing was a fake red beard, still damp from sweat. It hadn't been tossed aside long or it would be dry as sand.

But why?

Whoever I was chasing had bothered some about a disguise, then, but no hard case was likely to do that. He had to know something about Sand Flat—enough, anyway, to make sure no one recognized him.

I tied the whiskers to my saddle, wet Ginny's nose and lips again, and headed on.

The Blue Pines had deep shadows running along its ridges. I moved carefully here, following the track but trying to think ahead. Any one of those ridges could hide an ambush. I was cutting every one of them with my

eyes, probing every rock for the sudden blue flame of gunfire. I was surprised then to see the scattered shale and loose rock where the rider had spurred his mount straight up a ridge. I followed the crazy spiral with my eyes, wondering how a horse that had passed the flats in midday sun could do this thing. I traced the trail to the crest of the ridge and saw him.

I crawled on all fours, rifle out ahead of me and finger on the trigger, to get to the rocks where I had hit the man.

He sat his horse high atop the ridge—so high he looked like a small dark tree up there. He was watching me. He was nothing but a dark spot in the face of the evening sun, but I seemed to feel his eyes reach out and grab me. He knew I was watching, but he stood like carved rock. I half expected a rifle shot, but it was impossibly distant. He seemed to be shouting silently for me to turn back. Then the horse jumped a little and disappeared over the ridge.

One thing for sure, I wasn't going to drive Ginny up that ridge, so he had gained a good hour on me while I had to search out a draw to circle on him. He knew that, I reckon. It was a desperate move. But it also gave me a shiver. It gave him plenty of time to move ahead and set up an ambush. But I knew these draws, each one of them, I kept telling myself.

I put Ginny into a hard gallop, although I knew I was hurting her. She was all guts and muscle, if not a lick of sense. She pounded toward a draw that led up the far end of the ridge. The draw didn't circle this ridge, I knew, but angled gently up into the farther hills. If Ginny had it in her, I just might cut the rider off and set up my own ambush. We reached the draw, deeply shadowed in a gash in the ridge, at a pounding gallop. I let Ginny clamber along its rocky bottom until she was blown. Even though the ridge sent down long, fumbling shadows that hid the gravel bottom, the air was still hotter than a furnace and sweat rolled down my body to the lathered horse. When the rocks grew too rugged for hard riding I jumped off and hand walked her for a few hundred yards to cool her down. Not until then did I pour half a canteen into my hat and let Ginny drink. She sucked like she would inhale it, hat and all. I walked her a few hundred yards farther, then mounted and held her to a walk while she picked her way through the shadows and rocks.

There was a long ridge between me and the rider, and I was taking a heck of a long shot. If he had turned south, I had lost him. I was guessing he had hoped to draw me up the ridge behind him and that he was angling north. I wouldn't know until I came out of the draw, but even then he may have outguessed me. He might be sitting there with a rifle sighted down my breastbone. My head buzzed trying to figure it out. I felt a headache pounding under the damp brim of my hat.

Only one way to go now, I figured. Night shut down fast in the pines. I had always liked that before, camped on a ridge and feeling the high lonesomeness draw down. Ahead I caught a flash of purple in the west, then the sky clotted and grew dark. I walked Ginny again, letting my eyes adjust from the evening sun to the sudden deep night before moonlight came up.

I had about a mile to the end of the draw. I was figuring the rider's horse was about spent. If I played it right I would hit the mouth of the draw, where it funneled into the one I was guessing the rider was in, ahead of him. I moved more slowly. Something in me made me want to miss him. To head back to Sand Flat and say simply, "He got away. Sorry." June May looked at me and I cringed. Always Ben seemed above me, nodding, telling me to go on. The moon was fingering the gorge with a pale silver light when the shot rang out. It took Ginny high in the chest. I heard her gurgle, then snort through a nose full of blood. By then I was emptying my Colt's at the rocks above. Standing there blazing at nothing, like a fool, out of pure anger. He could have put a bullet in my gun flash as neat as a needle. Ginny jumped, bucked, and fell to the ground like a fallen limb. I leaped behind her, her flesh still quivering, and pulled the Spenser from its boot.

I lay panting behind the horse. I thought Ginny was dead but suddenly she heaved, gasped, then lay still. It gave me the creeps. I was scared silly. I fought to keep the shakes down.

So it was all lost. Not only did I have to go back without him, but I had to walk. I'd lost a good horse. I'd be laughed out of Sand Flat. I could see the sneers: I told you so.

But wait. If he was up in the rocks, he must have left his horse down the other side of the ridge. Maybe there was a chance. I studied the face of rock hard, peering

through the moonlight. I saw a motion high on the cliff and levered five quick shots at a shadow. The Spenser barked out with its hard, echoing bite. The shadow seemed to stumble once and I thought I heard a kind of thin yelp cut through the Spenser's echo.

I was running then, insanely, up the face of the ridge. I hammered up it, spewing gravel and making enough noise to wake the dead. Near the ridge I had to catch my breath so I spun three quick shots that chirped and whined like angry hawks into the rocks. By the time I crossed the ridge I didn't know if I was behind, ahead, or alongside the man. I stopped among some rocks and let my heart quiet down. Sweat ran down my face like rainwater. I jacked eight fresh shells into the rifle and waited.

I made out a grove of trees far below and studied it. I framed a route in my mind the man would likely take and moved downhill a bit to put myself in line.

I was wrong, all wrong. The unseen horse in the trees below gave a soft nicker and then I saw the man leap out of the rocks. He had managed to slip past me and was far below. My heart sank like a weight against deep water. He leaped across the lower rocks to the deep shadow of the trees and I knew I had but one split second or less to try for him, yet I held the rifle steady on the rock. In the trancelike light of the moon and the drifting shadows it was pure luck. As the man jumped from a rock a good hundred yards below, I did little more than point at the blur and squeeze the trigger. Yet, sighting along the barrel, I saw the figure twist and tumble in midair and sprawl forward.

I crawled down. He's playing possum, I told myself. Still, I had to get to that horse ahead of him. I crawled now on all fours, rifle out ahead of me and finger on the trigger, to get to the rocks where I had hit him. Then I saw the body sprawled flat out. Possibilities pounded through my head. Dead? Maybe knocked out ? Maybe playing possum with a revolver ready?

At last I stood and walked toward the figure, finger as itchy on the trigger as a hive of desert ants. I kept the barrel between his shoulder blades, but he didn't move.

Nor was he likely to for some time. My shot had taken him high on the leg and pitched him forward. No doubt he had knocked himself unconscious on the rocks over which he sprawled like a worn-out doll. The figure had grown monstrous to me there in the dark. Now he looked tortured, helpless, pathetic. I knelt by him, lifted his head by a fistful of hair, and felt the cry catch in my throat. My rifle fell with a clatter.

Even in the moonlight, the familiar lines of the sweat-washed face stood clear. He had some sort of dye on his face that was streaked from sweat, but it was Ben Davidson. Something in me told me I had known that all along.

I built a fire by the stand of pines where Ben had picketed his horse—a big fire that drove back the night. On the horse's back I found the saddlebags, packed with their pathetic roll of bills and coins. I was tempted to heave it on the fire. I also found some fixings, Ben's regular clothes with the star pinned to the vest, two full canteens, and some coffee and a pot. Apparently Ben had intended to hole up in the hills for a few days, then catch the train back into town. I set coffee boiling and then dragged his big body to the fire. There was a deep gouge in his upper arm, but the leg shot was the bad one. The slug had hit bone and shards were sticking everywhere in the torn flesh. It bled little, so the artery hadn't burst, but the leg would be forever worthless. I splinted and bandaged it as well as I was able, then I tore off Ben's old drifter clothes and put his own on him, including the vest with the star. I still don't know why I did that. Maybe I hoped to change what I knew I couldn't. I threw the old clothes on the fire. The sky turned black, then began to gray by the time I was done. I drank most of the pot of coffee, but I fell into a staggered sleep anyway.

It couldn't have been an hour or more, but Ben was awake when I opened my eyes. He stood like a sick, gray thing before me; hovering, teetering like an old worn-out cottonwood.

"Don't move, Matthew." He held a revolver, but its weight seemed to drag his whole arm to the ground.

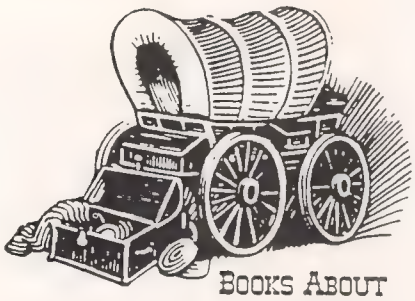
I lifted the rifle, its sights square between the man's shoulder blades. I imagined his heart pounding under the flesh.

"Don't, Ben. Don't make it worse."

"No, Matthew. It just don't work."

"Why, Ben?"

"Why?" His bloodless lips groaned in pain. The noise was like sand in his throat. "Ma dying. Why? No money. Ma dying." The words came in hard gasps.



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"They'll understand, Ben." Saying it, I knew better.

"Understand? No money, boy!"

I saw a track of thick blood surging around the bandaged leg. Either the wound had festered or a bone shard had punctured the artery. Blood pooled in a dusty splotch on his boot, rolled off into the earth.

"I'm going, boy. You're a good son."

I didn't know whether that was praise or an order. A million thoughts tore at my mind. Ben turned and hobbled like a pitiful scarecrow toward the horse. I didn't think he would ever make it up. I didn't know what he thought. I lifted the rifle where I sat, its sights square between his shoulder blades. I imagined his heart, a fitful nugget pounding, under the flesh. Gray light shimmered and slid around him. Not this way. Not in the back.

"Dad!" I shouted.

He turned, one hand supporting him from the saddle pommel. His white lips twisted in a smile as he turned. I didn't lower the rifle.

I heard his words scrape across the sand, but his lips didn't seem to move.

"Do what you have to, son."

The echo rolled like thunder in the morning hills. Some birds rose from the pine trees and circled the air frantically, then dipped and settled back.

Ben caved in like a little bent thing made of sticks.

The startled horse jerked to the end of its picket line and tossed nervous puffs of dust on the prone body.

There was little more to do, yet I didn't know where to start. A million lies rose in my mind and I didn't know which one to use. For once the truth wouldn't do.

The one I finally decided on went something like this—and by the time I reached Sand Flat with Ben's body behind me and blowflies like a green cloud around us, I didn't much care.

Seeing the blown horse stagger through the street, people kind of

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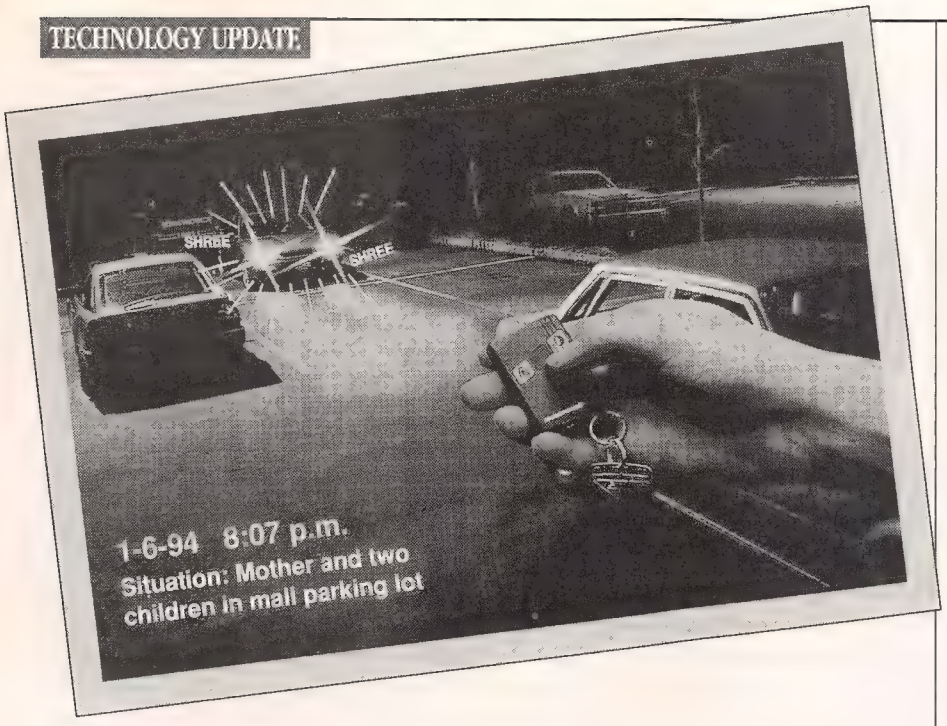


The first alarm system designed to protect you as well as your car...

Revolutionary new vehicle security system is the first of its kind to focus on the safety of the vehicle driver as well as the vehicle itself.

By Charles Anton

Do you wonder why car alarms have countless features to protect your car, but nothing to protect you? After all, what's more important your car or the safety of you and your family?

Now there is a car alarm that *will protect you and your family.* It is the first of its kind to focus on the safety of the vehicle owner as well as the vehicle itself.

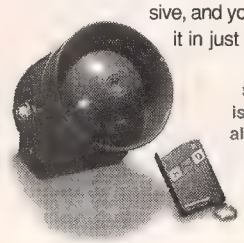
Protect yourself. It all begins with the panic button. Imagine you're walking to your car at night and a person approaches. Pushing the panic button on your transmitter lets your car come alive with a shrieking siren and flashing headlights. While the panic alarms of other vehicle security systems have a range of 100 feet, the Smart Alarm's panic alarm lets you call for help or scare away potential attackers from up to 400 feet!

Exclusive feature. Unlike other car alarm systems that begin and end their focus on personal protection with the panic alarm, that's just the beginning of the Smart Alarm. In addition to the panic alarm, the Smart Alarm also has a car finder feature. You'll never again have to wander around a dark and dangerous parking lot searching for your car. You will be able to know where your car is from anywhere within 400 feet by flashing its lights and briefly sounding the siren. You can activate and deactivate your car's headlights by remote control to light your way in a dark driveway or parking lot.

Carjacking. The Smart Alarm also addresses a growing hazard for today's motorists—carjacking. It's alarming how often drivers are hurt in their cars because they refuse to give them up to carjackers. Because of its anti-carjacking device, the Smart Alarm allows you to safely retain your car when confronted by a carjacker. This is made possible by a delayed panic alarm.

What makes Smart Alarm better?

- **Range.** Most car alarm features only work up to 100 feet away—all Smart Alarm features work up to 400 feet away.
- **Panic button.** Smart Alarm lets you call for help or scare away potential troublemakers by controlling a piercing alarm and your car's headlights.
- **Car finder.** Your car will be able to let you know where it is by flashing it's lights and briefly sounding the siren.
- **Carjacking.** Its delayed panic alarm allows you to safely prevent theft of your car when confronted by a carjacker.
- **Easy installation.** Other car alarms are complicated or cost hundreds of dollars to install. Smart Alarm is inexpensive, and you can install it in just minutes.



Smart Alarm is the first car alarm that will protect you and your family.

Easy installation. *Installing the Smart Alarm requires no fumbling with wires. Special Plug-In Connectors let you install the Smart Alarm without a single wire-cutter! Simply unplug the headlight connector, plug in the Smart Alarm connector, and then plug the headlight connector to the Smart Alarm. Connect the Smart Alarm to the battery cable with the special clip. In minutes, you and your car can enjoy complete 24-hour protection. Away from your car, you'll feel safer knowing that your car is protected! Near your car, you'll feel safer knowing that you are protected!*

All you do is give up your car and activate the delayed panic alarm. When the assailant has reached a safe distance and is no longer a threat to you, a deafening 120dB siren and flashing lights will force him to flee your car, letting you recover it safely.

Vehicle protection. Smart Alarm's current sensor triggers the siren if the trunk or any of the doors are opened while the alarm is armed. To supplement the current sensor, a shock sensor triggers the siren when it detects a blow to your car. Together, these sensors provide your car with blanket protection.

Compare
Other car alarms
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edged out, then retreated behind doors until the stink passed by. I went into the livery and sent the boy Virgil for the undertaker, and then walked back to Ben's office. They were waiting there, all right. Deakins, the attorney, Rountree, Smiley, all tight-faced and pinch-nerved.

How'd it happen, Matthew?

Well, he got away. For some reason Ben's trip was a ruse. He knew something was going to happen and had hidden in the hills. He was right, of course. Ever know Ben not to be right? I heard the shots. Saw Ben fall. I pumped some shots at the bandit. He shot back. Got my horse. Got away on Ben's horse in all the noise. Problem is, he left the moneybags still on his horse, where I found it in some trees.

I threw them on the desk. No one reached for them. It was blood money now. They aren't bad people, I told myself. Just scared.

And he left Ben. Dead. He's at the undertaker. A lot of bowed heads. Silence. Then:

You'll stay on, Matthew? As deputy?

Until Ma dies, then I'm leaving.

What'll we do?

You know Ma's dying, don't you? You know she needs an operation over to Bozeman?

No. We never knew.

You never looked. And here Ben died, saving your money. You're a tight-fisted people, I said; long on the pocket and short on heart. I'm riding out when this is done.

I was sorry I said that. They all left then. I walked back to Ma Davidson to tell her, but I think she knew. I saw June May in the doorway of the Mercantile. I nodded.

"Did you get him, Matthew?"

"I got him," I said.

Ma died within three weeks. It wasn't a bad town, I thought at the funeral, just sort of sad. I didn't regret riding out, but I never once thought of going back. In addition to such things as I could strap on my horse, Ben's big sorrel, I took two things—the deputy's badge and the sheriff's badge. Let the town get new ones. These were mine.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

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THE VISITOR

BY JUDY MAGNUSON LILLY

That night we heard the high wail of the prairie wolf ricocheting off a clouded moon and thought nothing of it. Even for Sallie, the sound was as familiar as wind rustling the grasses on her unplowed ground.

Outside the one-room cabin we could hear the pulley rope whipping against the well post and the sleet snapping at the windowpanes. But these sounds made up our world and we thought little about them, even on a winter night when between us and our closest neighbor lay three miles of snow-covered prairie.

My name was Cady Lydia Browne before my marriage, and during that harsh winter of 1862 I was Sallie Bean's "right-hand" girl, you could say, lent by my family to help around the place and to get her through these first months after the accident. Sallie, who was newly widowed, owned the cabin and the 160 acres that spread around us like a woolly blanket.

That night I sat cross-legged in front of the fire for warmth and light, reading. A flannel wrapper hung on my bony fifteen-year-old frame, and beneath it my heart raced as I read a tale of a daring stranger who saved a maiden from a dark-skinned savage. Sallie

stood at our plank table, kneading up spongy bread dough, flour dusting her face and apron.

"Listen to this," I said without looking up. " 'He lifted Mariah into his arms and shielded her body with his own as he fought the flames of the burning wagon.' "

The thought of a masculine body brushing against me made me shiver with excitement and ache with feelings I couldn't name. I longed to talk to someone about them, but if Sallie was remembering her married nights, she didn't let on. Being nearly three years older, she only smiled, and nodded for me to continue reading. It was then the faint whinny of a horse filled a lull in the wind's whistling.

"What was that?" Sallie said, straightening and turning her head slightly.

"Sure as the moon wasn't Old Black or Princess," I said. Our horses were tied in the shed with Old Bet, not ten yards from the cabin. This sound was distant. I remember how we turned to each other but said nothing. Then we heard the drumming of unshod hooves on the frozen ground and, though the sound seemed to be moving steadily away from us, Sallie turned down the lamp wick.

I can still see the room as it was then, shadows crawling up the mud-chinked walls to disappear in open rafters overhead. I remember how we held our breath and waited in the near darkness, hoping the faint dragging sound we were hearing had something to do with the wind.

When Sallie spoke finally in a low, sad voice—her natural one, and not just the consequence of being four weeks a bride and five months a widow—she kept her words matter-of-fact. "Surely we're not getting company now, not this time of night, and with the storm coming up. Do you think, Cady?" I watched her

We held our breath and waited in the darkness, hoping the faint dragging sound we were hearing had something to do with the wind.

small, resolute form move to the corner by the bed to find Will's old Hawkins. She hoisted the rifle to her side, and I considered whether Pa or Ben Bean, Sallie's brother-in-law, might be riding over to warn us about the weather.

"Somehow, I can't see us gittin' company tonight," I said and scrambled to my feet, much as I hated leaving my story when it was just getting good. Like Sallie, I spoke in church tones without knowing why. Living here as we had for the past three months had never bothered either of us. Oh, we had heard things—awful things, about women being dragged into a cruel life of captivity—but mostly we kept our minds on daily chores, chopping wood or making soap, or whatever needed done. If Sallie ever had second thoughts about staying on in the valley after Will's death, she never let on. In fact, her all-to-pieces good humor sometimes came as a trial to my own moody nature. "What would I do without you, Cady, dear," she'd say, all smiles, while we were up to our elbows in lard rendering. "Will would be proud of us both if he could see us now. Let them say what they want. We're doing just fine." It was true that between the two of us we had kept Will's improvements going, but standing here in the middle of the room, listening to peculiar sounds outside the cabin, I wasn't sure how intimidating I could be if the need arose. Never mind that I could split rails and butcher a hog as well as my brother Henry.

Then the moan began at our backs. It was the wind, I suppose, in the chimney, swelling and driving flames back to their source. Still we clutched each other, the gun between us, and turned to face the fire, slowly, like figures on a music box, and back again full circle because the sound seemed to seep into the chilled gloom around us, spreading through the room until it lay at the foot of the cabin door. Sallie choked back a scream, and I could hear her quick breathing. We were in a proper fix now, I remember thinking. The two of us were alone in the middle of a wide, white prairie with only log walls between us and some wailing spook. Then Sallie spoke in a hoarse whisper. "The door! Someone . . . the door." I stared at her, and then I heard it, too—a scratching and a dull thud against our bolted door. I'd have given most anything we had for some handsome stranger to be standing beside us. I'd even have settled for Pa or Henry, but they were miles away, spreading their fire low for the night, likely not giving us a thought.

The rolling and scratching continued. We inched toward the door, the rifle still between us, arms linked. Then Sallie shook herself free and set her feet, lifting the long barrel. What she heard then I can't say, but she caught me by surprise.

"Cady. Open it."

I wasn't hearing straight, I knew, and stood stooped forward at the waist, my knees and elbows bent and locked, not moving a finger.

"Open the door, Cady," she said again, and I heard iron in her voice. "Someone's hurt out there."

"Do you think . . ."

"I've got the gun ready. Open it up." She spoke with an eerie calmness that seemed out of place to me, but I was used to doing what Sallie Bean said. I struggled with the wooden bolt, sliding it off its iron holders finally and easing the heavy door to a narrow opening.

At first nothing happened.

I felt a rush of cold air sting my face, but that was all. Nothing but the wind. "Can you see . . ." I said, but stopped and sucked in icy air. My scalp twitched and quivered. Out of the darkness, a form pushed against the bottom half of the door and turned into a head, a bald head, except for a narrow strip of stiff, black hair that curved along the center back of the skull and down onto bare, copper-colored shoulders. Sallie and I froze as the long, muscular body of an Indian slumped at our feet.

I thought he was dead. We rolled him to his back, and he reminded me of a corpse I had seen once in Missouri, stretched out beside a river where Pa had stopped to water our team. He wore nothing but a pair of deerskin breeches and calf-high moccasins. The breeches were stained red and caked with snow. A wide, long gash cut across his forehead and onto his left eyebrow.

"Bring over the lamp, Cady," Sallie ordered.

"I think we should let him freeze," I said. Through the open door, I could see the snow filling the wide prairie outside our cabin, blowing in sheets and spirals. He wouldn't last long. This great norther was our protector.

But Sallie wouldn't hear of putting him out, and I found I didn't have the will to argue. I shoved the door closed, half expecting to turn and see the brown hands around Sallie's throat, forcing her beneath him, the hunters' tales coming true before my eyes. Then I went for the lamp.

We bent over the figure, and my heart thundered over the howling wind. He wasn't much older than Henry and no more cruel-looking or menacing. For one weak moment I couldn't take my eyes from his fierce young face. Smooth brown skin stretched across his high cheekbones and down over square jaws. Jabbing at my mind were tales of the buffalo men about women carried off and never heard from again—women who came to be more Indian than white after a time.

Sallie began pulling the half-naked form to the fireplace. I had no choice but to help her lay him on buffalo robes. His skin felt like river ice as I wiped away clotted blood from his broad forehead and a wound in his side. Into the open flesh we smeared a mixture of skunk grease and turpentine. Once, black eyes opened to stare into the flames, but he seemed not to know we were there. It took the two of us to wrap muslin strips around his leathery middle. More than once I had to lean across his dark body. I could feel his warm breath against my face. Emotions were tumbling through me that night—fear and other feelings I didn't understand.

We bent over the wounded Indian and my heart thundered. He wasn't much older than Henry and no more menacing.

When we had finished, and the Indian was covered over so that he looked like a buffalo back in its hide, we moved to a far corner where we leaned against the wall and each other. The wind, without break from any nearby trees, still rocked our cabin. The rough logs at my back were cold, and a shiver ran through my body.

"He might be Pawnee," I said. "Likely on a horse raid." Certainly he wasn't a blanket Indian like any I'd seen before. Most of them were old and toothless, coming into the settlement to trade currants and gooseberries for supplies.

"A horse raid in through the valley?" Sallie sounded surprised. Her head came just above my shoulder, and I marveled that she had been able to wrestle the nearly dead weight of our patient.

"He was shot by another Indian," I said. "Probably a Cheyenne, maybe a Kaw. The hole's deep and the flesh is ripped back a bit. Pulled the arrow out himself, most likely. He'd have made it except for the storm." I paused for a time before I added, "Usually they travel in bands of six or eight."

I remember I went to rebolt the door then, and Sallie retrieved Will's firearm from where it lay on the floor, keeping it in easy reach. We both stood for a time in our corner, watching the silent, shaggy mass in front of the fire.

"Ben hasn't cautioned me on Indian trouble," Sallie said finally, her large eyes white against the darkness of the cabin. I slid down the rough log wall to the floor and curled my legs under me, rubbing my arms for warmth. Bands of Kaw passed my Pa's claim almost daily during certain times of the year. We never gave them much thought. They begged food and sometimes stole washing off the line. But we now had a Pawnee within our cabin walls. Were they less troublesome? Or more? Sallie walked over to the fire and then

back again to me. We could hear the breathing of the Indian mixing with the wind.

"The Kaws are known for their tendency to help themselves to whatever they want," I said. "They're harmless, generally. The Pawnee—well, I've not heard of any real trouble with them around here."

"No horse stealing, then? From the settlers?" I knew Sallie was thinking about Will's mare. She was a beauty. Sallie and Ben had brought her back from Leavenworth. They'd had to leave Will in a grave at Wathena, but they'd brought back Princess.

"Not this close to the settlement," I said. "'Course, most claims have a man or two around to discourage such a thing."

The fire snapped, and the figure moved suddenly and called out a strange word. I couldn't say just what Sallie's thoughts were at that moment, but I was remembering how the church ladies thought she ought to sell out and go back home. Maybe, after a respectable time, find another husband. I had heard their talk at Sunday meeting last fall, right after she'd arrived in the settlement. Everybody was caught up short by the news of the train wreck. "This terrible war," they said. "No doubt, Missouri secessionists responsible. Poor William, bringing his bride back and all," they said, "and poor Sallie, barely eighteen years old." The church ladies gave each other dark looks and patted her hand and brought her food and whispered into one another's ears. Sallie heard them, I know, but she kept her shoulders straight and a smile on. No one worked harder than she did, pulling corn, putting up meat in hams. Whatever needed doing Sallie Bean did for herself, not wanting to ask for a lick of help.

I recall how, after our discussion, Sallie sat in her rocker for a time, winding and unwinding a wool muffler around her hands. Her feet scarcely touched the floor. At last she came to me where I shivered in the corner, wrapped in a faded nine-patch quilt from home.

Before me, Sallie's whole body seemed to tremble, more with excitement than fear, as though we were playing a game. Never mind that a full-scale snowstorm raged outside and a wounded savage slept within.

We worked quickly that cold February night in the shadowy room, ever aware of the heavy, even breathing of the Indian.

"It occurs to me that we need not advertise we're two females living alone." She knelt and braced her hands on the bare, wooden floor, putting her face directly in front of mine, so close that I could see a flesh-colored mole on her left cheekbone. Her brown eyes blazed, and her breath came in short puffs. "In fact, we can make it seem just the opposite."

We worked quickly that cold February night, moving here and there about the shadowy room. We were ever aware of the heavy, even breathing of the Indian. By light of the fire and lamp, we unpacked the wagon box and an orange crate, pushing things out of sight behind the cupboard, and tossing belongings haphazardly about the room. And when we had done what we could—what we thought would save us from losing life and livestock and maybe worse—we made ourselves ready for bed.

"I'll spend the night in the rocker, Cady, dear," Sallie said, leaning close to my ear as I sat on the floor beside the open wagon box. "Remember, you are my pretend husband now, shivering and shaking in bed with ague." She smiled and raised her eyebrows. I nodded but couldn't smile.

We added to my bulk with extra bedding to make me look formidable. Sallie banked me with quilts and gunnysacks into the bed Will Bean had carved to share with his new bride. Perhaps I looked like an ailing man laid up with the chills and fever, but what would that mean to a thieving savage? I hardly slept that night, covered nearly over with my buffalo and a wool wrapper wound about my ears.

Never once, it seemed, did my eyes stray from the form that lay three feet from the bed. I watched the woolly robe rise and fall and hoped it would suddenly stop for good. Ma's butcher knife, used to split the coarse hide of many a hog, made a noticeable lump under the pillow, and I kept wondering if a man's hide cut as hard as an old sow's. The brass fittings of Will's firearm caught the light from the low-burning fire and sent it bouncing about the room as Sallie's boots kept up a slow, monotonous rocking. To pass the time I counted bricks I could see in the hearth and watched snow sift down from cracks in the roof, settling like chalk dust on the rafters.

Finally, in a kind of half sleep, I dreamed about Will Bean riding across my Pa's dooryard, tossing down a small bag of potatoes tied with a blue hair ribbon. In my dream he said, "Tie this around your pretty red hair, Cady, so them Indians down by the ford

won't lift it off your head." Even in my sleep I could hear the pounding of a horse's hooves on dry Kansas earth as Will rode out of sight, raising dust, the way he had done last June on his way East after Sallie. My dream was more vivid than my real view of him that day. I couldn't know then that he wasn't coming back. If I had, I'd have stood in the yard and watched him much longer.

At dawn, I pulled on Will's coat and boots and crept from the cabin to do chores. As I pulled the cabin door closed, I could see Sallie bent over the Indian, changing the dressing on his wound and sponging off his face. Outside I fought the deep snow between the cabin and shed, where I milked Old Bet. The water trough held solid ice that wouldn't break. I filled a bucket with snow and pushed it into the piles of hay I had just overturned. Despite the cold, I hated going back inside. When I did, Sallie drew me to our talking corner. "Could you make it to your pa's?" she asked. I told her the snow was far too deep. "Besides," I said, "what would happen if the Indian's fever broke, and you were here alone?"

For the rest of the day and night we continued our charade, but the figure on our puncheon floor moved only now and again and never opened his eyes. Sallie and I seldom spoke. Instead, we'd signal to go outside or when a meal was ready. We both lived in our own thoughts for that time, I guess, dreaming and wondering and watching the form before the fire. Sometimes I read from my story, though my mind wandered from it. I couldn't help wondering if we were doing right, or if we were as witless and helpless as the girl in the wagon.

On the morning of the second day, well after sunup, the Indian stirred. Sallie had been about the room for some time. The window shutters were open. Coffee boiled in the enameled pot that hung over the cooking fire. Bread dough in the Dutch oven had baked long enough to fill the room with its sweet smell. Sallie bent over her hickory broom, sweeping flour into floor cracks, and could not have seen the Indian's wary eyes roam about the cabin. But my eyes followed his, and I observed with fresh appreciation the changes we had made in the room. The dark look of the Indian slid past Sallie to the rifle that rested against the table. He saw the powder horn and ramrod that lay beneath it. On an iron nail near the door hung a heavy wool coat with a beaverskin hat next to it. Will Bean's boots, worn and cracked, lay beside the milk pail and strainer. With his back to the fire, the Indian had full view of our one-room home. He could see the shaving brush and mug and straight-edge on the nail keg by the washbasin. And though I closed my own eyes as his neared me in bed, I knew he would see the denim trousers and hickory shirt hanging on the bedstead, awaiting the wearer. I wondered if the Indian saw what we intended.

For me, the presence of Will Bean filled the room from the puncheon flooring he had split and fitted for his bride, on up to the rafters that he planned to board after he'd fetched her from Illinois. For a moment I expected to hear his whistle sounding at the door and to see his tanned, clean-shaven face, smiling as usual, telling us nothing was as serious as it seemed. But all I could hear was the swish of Sallie's broom and the bubbling of the coffeepot.

Suddenly, the Indian gave out a low cry.

My eyes flew open to see him rising unsteadily to one elbow. Sallie whirled to face him and reached for the rifle. For a moment neither moved. My fingers gripped the handle of the butcher

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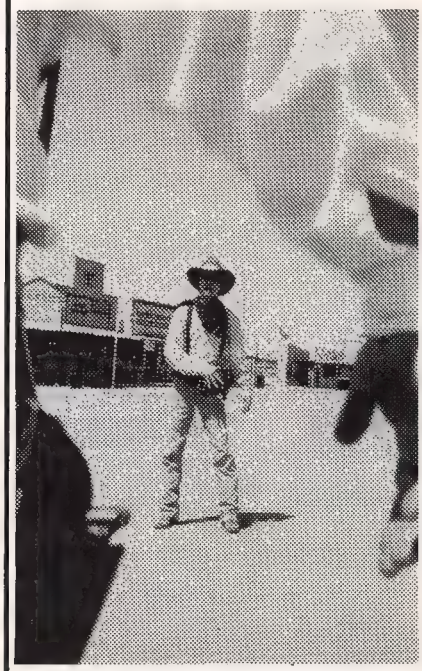

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knife. The strong light of the morning sun bleached all color from the cabin room, and it seemed I was viewing a line drawing of a western scene. But this before me was no picture. I could hear the Indian's clipped breath and the waking song of the crows scavenging outside. I could smell the stale night air not yet flushed from the room and the mingling odors of coffee and newly baked bread. And something else, too—something in the Indian's mysterious face that I'd never seen before or ever considered a possibility. Across his brow where the wound made a diagonal slash and through his dark eyes moved a quick shadow of uncertainty and fear. The young buck was afraid of us—two women with shaking hands and pounding hearts. I stared at him as though for the first time. Sallie must have seen the look, too. She stood straight as a sapling, not wavering or blinking, but holding level the barrel of Will's rifle.

"No," the Indian grunted and waved his hand in a motion in front of his chest. From my shrouded place in bed, I breathed deep to slow my heartbeat and watched Sallie sign to the stranger that she would give him food. I waited for him to leap from his bedding and seize the rifle from her. For all I knew an Indian had some magical power to make himself whole and strong that the white folks shunned. But instead he nodded and she handed him coffee and a tear of fresh bread.

"Our guest seems much improved, Will," Sallie called out in my direction. It took me a second to realize the words were for me. I didn't know whether to answer or keep all-fired still. I merely grunted, feeling the low vibrations in my throat, wishing Sallie wasn't so chirpy. But the Indian seemed not to hear us. While he ate slowly in front of the hearth, still supported by his elbow, I saw Sallie fill a burlap bag with a loaf of bread, jerked buffalo meat, and several shriveled potatoes. She took a red woolen shirt and blanket from the wagon box and laid them beside him. Several times during his breakfast, his eyes traveled around the room. I thought it not lost on him that Sallie sat down to breakfast with Will's rifle at her elbow. Still, for my money, she appeared too calm, as though entertaining an Indian was as ordinary as drawing water from the well.

After a time the Indian put down his plate and shoved it across the floor toward Sallie. With difficulty he unfolded himself from the shaggy bedding and stretched out his long body. He touched the bandage around his waist, and though I heard a quick sucking breath, not a muscle in the broad face moved. First one arm and then the other slid into the sleeves of the red shirt. Will Bean had been a large man, but the cuffs of his shirtsleeves caught the Indian above the wrist. I found myself thinking that he shouldn't leave yet, that his wound might start to bleed again. At the door, with the blanket wrapped around him, he threw back the latch board, his long body swaying unsteadily.

Sallie followed him, but did not carry the rifle with her. Our visitor stood looking down on her; his dark, sharp features were unreadable to me. I thought of all the times a Kaw brave or squaw and dark-eyed children had come to our cabin and begged molasses and bread. I had given them little attention, though we valued most visitors as gems. The Indian uttered two sounds in a gruff, grunting fashion; Sallie smiled and inclined her head. I watched his powerful arm open the door and then pull it closed behind him.

The stillness of the cabin swelled around us. At first neither of us moved. Then Sallie hurried to the window, and I rolled from the burden of blankets and quilts. Together we watched him for a long while walking northwest, the blanket flapping behind him in a steady wind, his every step high and measured in the snow.

Finally we turned away. Sallie lifted her shoulders, and with her hands on her waist, stretched out her back. Then she gathered up Will's shaving mug, brush, and straight-edge, holding them for a moment before putting them away. I hauled down his trousers and shirt and carried them to the wagon box. For the first time in many hours I thought of the burning wagon in my story. It didn't seem to matter anymore how the girl in the story was rescued.

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the SNAKEBITE CURE

BY R. C. HOUSE

"Damn you, Jace. Did you order this weather?"

"Battlin' Bob" Dowd yanked out his sweat-soaked shirttail while still on horseback and fumbled with the last two buttons. He pulled the shirt open to expose his glistening chest and belly to whatever breeze there might be.

The sun beat down fit to blind a man.

The two horsemen, all that moved in the sunbaked sprawl of scrub-crowded desert valley, had paused on a slight rise to give their horses a breather. The heat rained out of a cloudless and hostile sky to ricochet off the parched, packed gravel, bidding fair to suffocate them, as well as to render them sightless.

DOWD STUDIED HIS PARTNER AS THEY NUDGED THEIR HORSES INTO AN EASY WALK. *NEVER REALLY LIKED HIM,* DOWD THOUGHT. *NEVER REALLY TRUSTED HIM.*

From their position smack-dab in the middle, Jace Petrie hauled off his big, broad-brimmed hat and held it in the hand that clutched the reins. With the fingers of his other hand, he combed the sweat back through his short-cropped, wiry brown hair to get it off his forehead, where his hat had been. Below the hat line, Jace's face was flushed from the heat.

"How far to Jackass Springs?" Jace growled.

Jace had an annoying habit of ignoring Battlin' Bob's questions, such as the one he had just posed about the weather. Dowd regarded Petrie through squinted eyes. They had ridden the owlhoot trail together for five years, but Dowd still didn't fully care for his partner. Petrie was tight-lipped and seldom took to humoring. They weren't easy traits to accept in a man, especially one you spent weeks alone with. The only value to the relationship was that they worked well together.

Between them they had heisted more than a few banks, two or three trains, plus any number of stages and individual riders in out-of-the-way places. Several freight companies had crude sketches of them on wanted posters.

"One day to Jackass Springs by crow flight, Jace," Battlin' Bob said, making one more fruitless attempt to humor his companion. He fanned his body with his flapping shirt front. "But we ain't sprouted feathers so I figure two or three days, at the most."

"This is damn fool business ridin' across this fryin' pan if that money ain't in the bank."

"Dammit, Jace, quit your bellyachin'. The money's there. Dunn said it was going to be. Abe Dunn ain't let us down yet when it come to smokin' out good pickin's."

"It better be. That's all I got to say. It better be."

"Or what, Jace?" The heat and Petrie's sour attitude honed a ragged edge on Battlin' Bob's patience.

Jace Pertrie looked sharp at him, a grim, narrow side glance. Dowd wondered if that face had ever known a smile. He'd never seen it. Well, once or twice, he recalled, when a job produced more than they figured. Then it only flitted across Petrie's face and was gone.

"Or I'm pullin' out, that's what," Jace barked.

Dowd studied his partner as they nudged their horses into an easy walk. *Never really liked him,* Dowd thought. *Never really trusted him.* Brought together by Abe Dunn, the pair got along well at first as they successfully pulled a few robberies and skillfully avoided apprehension. After a time, Petrie's always half-angry disposition began to grate on Dowd's short-fused nerves. In this kind of business, he needed a man he could like. And trust. It hadn't been an easy five years.

Maybe this would be their last job. Maybe just as well. They separated as they rode toward the pass at the south end of the valley. Confined inside a cocoon of silence and heat away from Petrie, Battlin' Bob had time to think.

The animals needed water. There was a tree-shaded bench, he knew, somewhere between here and Jackass Springs, the business hub of this end of the territory. They'd find water up there and a good place to lay over for part of a day before they hit town.

A recent strike had brought a flurry of mining excitement to a camp about thirty miles west of Jackass Springs. The front man for the pair of professional holdup men, Abraham Dunn, who made his respectable money posing as a whiskey drummer, had learned that a payroll was being processed in the Jackass Springs bank. At the same time, a big gold shipment was being held in the vault awaiting an eastbound stage. Dowd and Petrie figured to pluck both plums in one grab at the fruit.

Dowd reined his easy-walking mount closer to Petrie. "Pull out after Jackass Springs, hey?"

"I said I was thinking about it. No skin off you either way."

"Yeah, maybe some skin and maybe my neck. Likely you'll turn me and Abe in on the sly and go pick up our stash. This could be a big one."

"Why, you think I'd stoop to a low trick like that?"

"You ever give me cause to think otherwise?"

"Either way, I'm for gettin' there and gettin' it done, crows or no crows."

Dowd was surprised that Jace acknowledged his earlier attempt at humor. He enlarged on the joke. "Black and shiny as crows we'll be when we hit the Jackass Springs bank." Petrie shot Dowd a puzzled look that quickly went back to a scowl.

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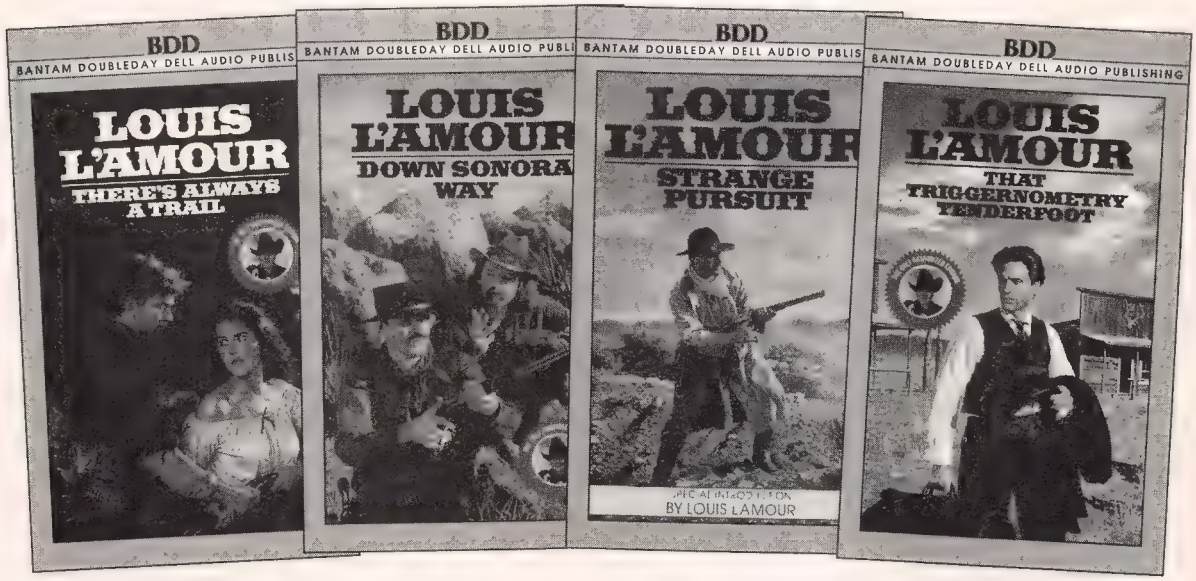

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AUDIOBOOKS—A WHOLE NEW WAY OF BEING ENTERTAINED!

THEY TOOK TURNS WATCHING THE BANK FROM BEHIND THE LACE-CURTAINED WINDOW, ONE WATCHING WHILE THE OTHER STRETCHED OUT ON WHAT HAD BEEN CLEAN SHEETS.

"I meant our clothes," Dowd explained impatiently.

Coiled neatly in bedrolls tied behind their saddles were black business suits. They planned to ride into Jackass Springs, put up at the hotel, bathe and shave, study the setup, and when the time was right, saunter into the bank without attracting undue attention. It had worked before—in the suits, they passed as ordinary businessmen. After they made their move, then time and speed would be their greatest allies. If the weight of the stuff was too much for the horses, they'd appropriate a wagon somewhere—maybe a sleek little buckboard.

While the town still reeled in shock and disorganization, they'd race as far as prudent, quickly burn their town duds with the wagon, and become shiftless-looking, down-at-the-heels saddle drifters again.

They had even been stopped and questioned by excited, searching posses. Dowd and Petrie were crafty enough to play on townsmen's native stupidity and confusion. Act dumb yourself, Battlin' Bob often told Jace, and you could sell beadwork to Indians.

Their usual trick, if they needed to steal a wagon, was to bury their loot deep and perch the wagon over the spot before setting it afire. It never occurred to their pursuers to check for the loot or gold there. Town marshals and their posses only got more steamed up and quickly rode on, more convinced than ever they were hot on the trail of the owlhoots and their loot.

Even if they searched the two saddle bums they came across, all they'd find would be meager handfuls of silver and a small wad of grimy, well-thumbed bills on each of them; not much to hang a man for.

In a few weeks, maybe a month, Petrie and Dowd would drift back into the area leading a pack horse, casually checking to make sure no sentinels had been posted at their cache site, and camp near the pile of old ashes and twisted metal from the wagon. When they were sure the coast was clear, they'd dig up the loot and sidle on.

Jackass Springs was the kind of town they had expected when they rode in two days later. Though unshaven, they had on the black suits. They checked in at the hotel without delay, bathed and shaved, and quickly took on the respectable image of men of gentility and substance.

Dowd and Petrie were whipthin, slightly built men of average height. Their faces carried no strong distinguishing features to set them apart in a crowd. They could easily change identity with a change of clothes.

The bank they studied from their hotel window was typical of any small, drowsy trail town. If the unexpected prosperity of the Cactus Queen Mine thirty miles away made any difference at the bank, it didn't show. For a full day, they studied the comings and goings from the window.

The air in the room was lifeless—insufferably hot and sticky. Stripped to the bare essentials, they took turns behind the lace-curtained window, one watching while the other stretched out on what had been clean sheets, alternately sipping bottled rotgut from the bar downstairs, or tepid water from the pitcher and basin on a marble-topped bedside commode table.

As they changed shifts at the window, the sheets on either side of the bed turned damp with sweat. Jace Petrie was in a foul mood and it only deepened with his drinking. Dowd, recognizing this, didn't say much except what needed to be said about people entering or leaving the bank, and about changes of watch at the window.

Their sharp senses quickly tuned to the rhythm of the bank's business. The doors officially opened at nine. There was a light flurry of activity between nine and eleven, after which the tellers, probably, and then the bank manager, came and went in shifts to eat. Business was only moderate in early afternoon, picking up for three-quarters of an hour starting a bit before two. Fifteen or twenty minutes before closing at three, banking activity ground virtually to a standstill.

At four, with the heat at last moderating, Dowd and Petrie freshened up, got into their suits, and strolled out of the hotel, eventually bound for an early supper. On their roundabout way, they explored the town briefly and with little comment while scenarios of escape hatched in their minds.

In the alley behind the bank they found the back door—solid oak planking with huge, forged-iron hinges and a large key escutcheon beneath the hooked

"Bank's closed for the day," Jace announced loudly from his place by the door. Battlin' Bob unlimbered a businesslike .44.

latch bar. The bank building was thick, impregnable adobe.

"Right sturdy-lookin', ain't it?" Battlin' Bob asked quietly as they strolled past the rear door in the cool gathering of dusk.

"Only takes one key," Jace observed dryly.

They had a before-supper drink at a saloon down the street from the bank. A few carefully worded questions of some of the local hangers-on brought them volumes more than they needed to know about mining successes, gold shipments, and payrolls.

Dowd gloated. The townsmen were excited and talkative about the newfound prosperity. The gold was there—refined bullion—and a sizable payroll in folding money. The mining company paid by check, but the miners would be in town Saturday, and the bank was obliged to honor the drafts for wages. It was Tuesday and the town would be virtually deserted until the weekend. It was all, almost, too perfect for words.

The bank staff they had spotted from the window consisted of two young men, not built stoutly enough or of sufficient constitution to be cowhands or miners. One old woman was seen leaving the bank a little before noon and returning in half an hour. They figured she was a bookkeeper who might double as a teller. The bank president or manager was also old, softened and bent by years of desk work.

All of them, Dowd and Petrie reasoned, would cave in at the first sight of a six-gun. At a bit before three, when the banking business tended to be quiet, they would saunter in, see to it that the bank closed at the proper hour, and set about their work.

They also spied a convenient buckboard with a young and spirited-looking mare in the traces, tied up in the shade behind a general store a few doors away from the rear of the bank.

They followed the same surveillance procedure the next day, but with less intensity. It only confirmed their impressions of the day before.

Their horses, corned, grained, and groomed for two days at the livery stable, were refreshed and lively as, a few minutes before two, Dowd and Petrie led them out and tied them loosely next door to the bank. They looked casually up and down the street. The town remained drowsy in the heat, paying little heed to the strangers in black suits.

To brace themselves, they had a couple of drinks at a different saloon. Shortly after the half hour they paid up, leaving a little extra silver for the barkeep, and sauntered out. The heat was oppressive after the cool interior of the saloon.

"We all set?" Battlin' Bob asked quietly.

"Come off that," Jace growled. "Sounds like you're play-actin'. Of course we're all set." He started off at a brisk pace. Dowd walked fast to keep up, his temper taking an edge to match the heat rolling up from the brittle boardwalk.

After they strode through the bank's front door, Jace kicked it shut. The air was pleasantly cool within the thick adobe walls. The clock on the far wall read two fifty-eight. One customer still lingered, jawing with the teller at one of the two cages. He was a cowman from the look of his outfit, in battered hat, range clothes, and a belted six-gun low-slung to accommodate a bulge of gut.

"Bank's closed for the day," Jace announced loudly from his place by the door. Battlin' Bob, a few steps away, hauled back his coat front and unlimbered a businesslike .44.

"If you mean to have supper tonight, Fatty," Dowd called curtly to the customer, "you'll haul out that plow-handle Colt easy with two fingers, lay it on the floor, and step away a respectable distance."

The man, sensing what was going on, did as he was told. Jace turned to the door and flipped the "Closed" sign so it read outward through the thick and beveled plate-glass panel.

"The rest of you—out!" Jace commanded. "Out front with our tubby friend here." Timidly, the two young men with slicked-down hair and the old woman, with hands in the air, came out from behind the cages and through a swinging half door to join the customer.

"Hey, Pop!" Jace yelled at the old man frozen in terror at his desk. "That means you, too!"

The old man's face was a mask of fear. His mouth worked at forming words. "I can't . . . get up."

"You what!" Jace roared, going over and peering at him over the half wall that fenced in the office area. The old man had his hands in plain sight, gripping his chair

"You go along when you want, Jace," Battlin' Bob said. "But I got a hunch you're fixin' to do me and Abe out of our rightful share."

arms. He was ashen, too terrorized to move.

"He can't get out of the chair, dammit!" Dowd called. "He's scared. Why not leave him be?"

Petrie strode to the man's desk and slapped him hard upside the ear. The sound of the blow rang in Dowd's ears. He winced. Such viciousness was uncalled for. In that instant, he hated Jace Petrie. The old man tumbled to the floor, cowering in pain and fear. He curled up, knees protecting his belly, his china-white and purple-veined hands shielding his head of thinning white hair against more blows. He whimpered.

From the desk, Petrie picked up a ring of several heavy keys. "The one to the back door's probably on here. Go get that rig we seen." He tossed them at Dowd, who caught them in a deft reach, the keys ringing a merry tune as he snagged them.

"Don't kick that man while I'm gone, Jace!"

From behind him, Dowd heard a sharp intake of breath and a whispered, "That guy who hit Mr. White must be Jace Petrie!"

Dowd wheeled around to confront the four bent together in fear in the center of the bank lobby. Recognition dawned on the face of one of the young tellers. "Then he's Battlin' Bob Dowd!"

Dowd's insides turned to fire with the sound of his name. "Like the man said," he snarled at them. "If you figure on wakin' up tomorrow, put a muzzle on them mouths."

From the manager's desk, Jace barked in anger. "Well, you done it now, Dowd!"

Fuming, Battlin' Bob headed for the back door. Anger, he knew, was wrong. Men bungled things when their heat was up. He passed by the open vault. It was close to the back door, purposely, for convenient transfer of gold and cash.

The sun was still high three hours later when, well away from town, Dowd and Petrie—saddle tramps again, judging from their clothes—went into camp in a grove of cottonwoods by a narrow, sluggishly flowing stream. In their mutual anger, they had spoken little on the ride out from town. Their best day ever hadn't been a good day between them.

After they had swiftly but skillfully cached a handsome haul of sixteen bars of gold bullion and banded stacks of bills in small denominations in several durable canvas sacks, they had burned the buckboard and the black suits directly over their deep-buried loot. The minute they could see that the little rig would quickly be reduced to ashes and metal straps and bolts, Jace Petrie began drinking from a full bottle of liquor he had brought from Jackass Springs. Dowd turned the lively little mare loose, swatting her once on the hind end, and she took off for parts unknown.

By the time they found a campsite several miles from the cache, Jace was in a foul mood and offered no help to Dowd in setting up their camp to look as though they had been there a week. Others had camped along this tree-shaded stream, so Dowd made their setup at a good, seasoned-looking fire bed. He sloshed some towel rags, a set of long-handled faded red drawers, and an old shirt in the stream and laid them on bushes to dry. He quickly got a pot of coffee going, to look like it was left over from breakfast. He set their black iron frying spider, scabby with crusted grease, next to the fire.

Jace Petrie offered nothing but to watch as he sprawled against a cottonwood trunk with his bottle, well on his way to getting a snootful. Instead of turning mellow and softening, as other men might after such a successful day, Jace only turned more sullen. He said little and scowled much as Dowd unwillingly toiled at the camp chores. The carefully rigged charade was all that would save them if a posse showed up.

As he worked, Dowd puzzled at what was on Petrie's mind. For sure it wasn't jubilation, though it should have been. The job and the take had been much easier and much more rewarding than they had bargained for. Dowd, still nursing a grudge over Petrie's treatment of the harmless old man and having to do all the camp work to fool a pursuing posse, sensed his own anger rising again to the flash point.

"Well, I suppose this is your big day," he said spitefully, spreading the wet, faded shirt on a nearby bush.

"How's 'at?" Jace asked with a sneer, his words slurred.

"The end of it. You said you was quitting, and I suppose today's the day."

"I said if the take wasn't good in Jackass Springs. But even if it was, yeah, I'm th'ough." Jace

DOWD THRUST DOWN A HAND WITH A HOARSE SCREAM TO GRAB THE SNAKE AND YANK THE LONG TEETH OUT OF THE PUNCTURE WOUNDS.

spoke through a thick tongue. "If we get th'ough this night without havin' some a them from town payin' us a visit, yeah, I'm movin' on."

"Yeah, Jace, but you ain't said—"

"Ain't said what?" Jace snarled his words.

"About when we come back and get the goods back there. And divvyin' up with me. And Abe Dunn."

"No, I s'pose I ain't."

"So you go along when you want, Jace. No skin off me, like you said. But I got a sneaky hunch you're fixin' to do me and Abe out of our rightful share of that back there."

"Aw, you would get into that, wouldn't ya? I can't think about that now. In the mornin'."

"Anybody who'd cuff a sniffling old man out of his chair is low down enough to butcher his partner while he's sleepin'. That's what the booze is all about. Gettin' your guts up to do it out of a bottle. Huh-uh, Jace Petrie. That back there split three ways is still a damned ace-high stake. That alone, with what we still got stashed here and there and around, would set one man up for a long time, maybe life. And a high life at that."

"And you think I'm ornery enough to do that?"

Anger was a hard lump inside Battlin' Bob Dowd; he knew Jace Petrie was that ornery.

Jace still perched against the cottonwood trunk. He measured his words. "If I was gonna do something like that, I wouldn't wait till night." He leaned forward slightly and his right hand drew back toward the holstered six-gun along his leg.

That fast, Dowd was out with his own hogleg, pulling off a deafening shot that buried itself somewhere below Petrie's heart in the lower area of his lungs. The impact hurled Jace back two or three inches to wallop his head against the unyielding cottonwood. Jace's body jerked with the slam of the bullet and lurched into the dirt beside the tree.

"Now there's just one of us to pick up the loot," Dowd gloated angrily, a euphoria spreading over him that in killing Jace he had spared his own life.

"Dammit, Bob," Jace groaned. "Dammit . . . I was just reachin' for . . . my bandanna." He fought for breath to build the words.

"Sure you were," Battlin' Bob growled at the dying man.

A strange giddiness invaded Dowd's brain. He lifted Jace's sagging body and propped him back against the tree. The soft bullet had flattened and torn an immense hole in Petrie's back, from which his life's blood surged. Jace's body slid to an uncomfortable slouch against the trunk, leaning back askew, his torso held up by his arms, already stiff with approaching death.

Battlin' Bob lost control of his emotions, sensing strange sensations surging through his body and his brain.

"Tell me . . . Tell me, Jace," he said, his voice a quivering tenor. "Tell me you were going to murder me in my sleep."

Petrie's eyes were wide in the stare of a man who knew he was dead. He opened his mouth to speak and a huge and thick crimson bubble appeared and broke, leaving his lips looking like those of a rouged whore. His eyes stayed open when he died.

In death, Petrie's mouth drew down tight and the edges, red with blood as they were, curled up. Dowd stared at the features. For once in his life—and the thought so amused Dowd that he thought he would start cackling insanely any second—Jace Petrie had a smile on his face.

As he watched the dead man transfixed, Dowd felt a numbing chill come over him, wiping away the euphoria of saving his own life by taking Petrie's. With the chill came panic—a nameless, suffocating kind of terror.

"I got to find a place to hide him!" he told himself aloud, speaking hurriedly, the chill turning his body into an icicle as he stared at the dead man. He hugged and rubbed his arms to restore circulation. "I can't swing for this now. All that money. It's mine. Got to hide 'im. When those guys come from Jackass Springs, they'll string me up on the spot. They could be here any minute."

Dowd started crashing his clumsy way upstream to find a secluded spot to get Petrie's body out of sight. His mind was only half on what he was doing. Even to himself he didn't make sense. Time, somehow, was running out. Still he lumbered on through the brittle underbrush along the stream, seeking a likely spot.

He was brought up short by a sudden, barely perceptible sound, muffled by the weeds. Somebody rattling dried seeds in a gourd, he

thought. His breath froze in his lungs with a sharp, quick, intense pain in the tendon behind his right knee.

Looking down in terror, he saw the huge, flat, glistening, gray-brown head of a diamondback cocked at an angle, struggling to withdraw saber-needle fangs. Dowd felt the tug and flex of the snake's hateful body against the jaws gripping his leg as the rattler struggled for release and escape.

Instinctively, Dowd thrust down a hand with a hoarse scream to grab the snake behind the head and yank the long teeth out of the puncture wounds. Instantly the snake's body rolled out to coil tightly around his upper arm, drenching Dowd with nameless horror and shock.

Acting totally on panicked impulse, Dowd released the head and struggled madly with his left hand to pull and claw the heavy, constricting force off his arm. The head flicked out again in sudden fury to bury the fangs deep with a spear of agony into the fleshy heel of Dowd's left hand.

Crazed and with no logic, Dowd wrested the huge snake free, flinging it away to crash into the underbrush. He raced back to camp, fire streaks of furious pain already searing up into his right thigh and left arm.

Jace Petrie sat still propped, wide-eyed in death, against the cottonwood trunk. His lips, drawn into their tight death grin, had dried to a scab-mahogany hue.

"Jace!" Battlin' Bob screamed, lunging up to the body. "A rattler got me! Jace—for the love of Christ, come back. Jace? You got to help me!"

Jace Petrie only sat there, calmly watching Dowd's agony, that tight, maddening grin spread all over his face. Dowd clutched his throbbing lower right leg, a consuming, mindless terror forcing away any other emotion.

"Oh, God," Dowd moaned breathlessly, his words coming in choked sobs. Already he felt feverish. "Jace can't help me. I'll have to cut it off. Got to cut off my hand, too. No, no. Can't do that. Maybe it's not that bad. Maybe I'll be all right. I'll lance 'em and put some of Jace's whiskey on 'em. I'll be all right. I'm gonna be all right!"

The moisture and the cool of night still lay on the land next morning when the Jackass Springs posse, on the prowl for a pair of bank robbers, made their way along the sluggish streambed. Late the evening before, they had come across the trail of shod horses an hour after finding the burned wagon.

At the campsite, they found one dead man leaned against a cottonwood, eyes propped open, grinning, most of his backside splattered against a tree trunk.

Another man lay dead a few feet from him, convulsed in an agonized death, his left arm a deep and mottled purplish black, swollen to twice its size. The arm's massive swelling had popped the seam of his threadbare old trail shirt. His right leg was bloated to the point of making the grimy Levi's pants leg resemble a blue-gray sausage.

"What the hell you make of this, Harold?" one of the posse asked the bewildered marshal.

"Hell if I know, Stan. One saddle bum shot dead, another laid out with the snakebite. And looky there, that bottle beside him. Looks like he was tryin' to save himself with the old snakebite cure. Least he probably died happy. You never know what gets into some of this saddle trash. They live like animals, y'know."

"You don't suppose they was Dowd and Petrie, do ya, Harold?"

"Nah! Them two there on the ground wouldn't know the first thing about taking a bank. Huh-uh. Not them two. I know a bank robber when I see one, Stan. And you know Freida and old man White over at the bank said that Dowd and Petrie was great big fellas. Them two stiffs there was half-pints."

"You'll report this, won't you, Harold?"

"Of course I'll report it. But just now, Stan, you and Rusty there, stay here and see that them two get a decent Christian burial. We got to get on and find Dowd and Petrie and that money before Sattidy night. They's gonna be a bunch of disappointed folks in Jackass Springs if we don't, and elections are comin' up. C'mon, fellas, they can't be that fur ahead!

"And hand me up that bottle, Stan. We may need it. Them two hardcases there sure as hell won't." WM

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HGHA-7

BY
Glendon Swarthout

A Horse for Mrs. Custer

Every man lives around the corner from history. Some pass it every day and never make the turning. Others, on their way, are detained by chance and cannot bear it witness. One recalls the Roman who, granting himself the luxury of a stay at Baiae, a resort on the Tyrrhenian coast, did not attend the Senate on the day Gaius Julius Caesar was struck down. One thinks nineteen centuries later of the gunner, fallen ill at the last moment, who was replaced in the ball turret of the B-29 that flew over Hiroshima. Yet the stories of men who have missed one of the larger human events are frequently as interesting as those who have participated. One of the strangest of these has lately come to light. It is remarkable in that history repeated itself, and the person absent on the first occasion was afforded the unique opportunity of being present at the second.

The tale is told in a small volume entitled Dakota Days, one of several privately printed in 1928 and written by Brigadier

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General Alexander Peddie, U.S.A., during the years of his retirement. General Peddie's career was long and distinguished and since his prose is that of a soldier, honest and direct, it is unfortunate that his reminiscences have not had wider circulation. Dakota Days *recounts his duty with the Seventh Cavalry Regiment beginning in the autumn of 1876, four months after its bloody stand, under George Armstrong Custer, on the Little Bighorn. It contains not only vivid descriptions of the Great Plains but the little-known episode mentioned above, the authenticity of which there can be no doubt.*

Permission has been granted by his granddaughter, Alice Peddie Wycomb, his only heir, to excerpt such passages as may serve the ends of unity.

Historians record that tidings of the Little Bighorn battle came as a dreadful shock to the nation. On 25 June 1876, the Seventh Cavalry was split in three formations by its commander in the face of twelve thousand Sioux, Oglala, and Cheyenne under Sitting Bull. Troops C, E, F, I, and L, those under Custer, were lost to the last man and horse, while other units, with Major Marcus Reno, were severely mauled. But the nation's grief changed soon to indignation as attempts were made in Congress and the press to fix the blame for the disaster. President Grant was personally assailed, but public attention was eventually concentrated on Custer himself. The country, as one pamphlet put it, "chose up sides." To the man in the street or the horse car or the saloon, General Custer became either hero or fool, martyr or murderer. Unfortunately, little heed was given to the effects such angry division would have upon the broken remnants of the now-famous Seventh.

It was at this juncture that young Alexander Peddie, newly commissioned a second lieutenant of cavalry from West Point, was ordered to Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory.

It was a long three days by train from St. Paul to Fargo and Bismarck at that time. I was anxious to get my first glimpse of the real West and eager to join the Seventh, whose name had become a household one the length and breadth of the land. I thought myself the luckiest young man alive, and even started a moustachio. Reaching Bismarck, where the railroad ended, I crossed the Missouri by ferry and reported for duty at Fort Abe the first week in November to Major Reno, commanding. I was assigned to I Troop, one of those which had been wiped out by the Sioux in the spring. It was commanded by Captain John C. Thomas, who was sent for to meet me and show me to my quarters. He came presently and we walked along the parade together. Captain Thomas was a man of medium height, powerfully built and clean-shaven. His hair was iron gray, a striking thing in a man no more than forty. He had little to say, showing in every respect the reserve which I was later to understand fully. But for that, I might have made the mistake of questioning him about the Little Big Horn.

Captain Thomas took me into the Custer house, saying I would be quartered here with seven other new lieutenants.

Captain Thomas took me into the Custer house, saying I would be quartered here with seven other new lieutenants. Mrs. Custer had gone Back East and the house was bare of furniture. As I expressed curiosity, we strolled though the empty rooms in which had echoed only months before the clink of the general's saber and the sound of his voice calling "Libbie! Libbie!" to his wife. In the small study he had written those articles for *Galaxy Magazine* which had stirred the country's blood, while his beloved "Libbie" waited patiently outside, for he could not compose unless she sat near.

Then we went into the long drawing room. On the walls still hung trophies of the general's passion for hunting—the heads of grizzlies, black-tail deer, and antelope. On the mantel were a yellow fox, an owl, and a sandhill crane. But on the floor was a strange arrangement. At one end were four bedrolls, and at the other end three. I stood a moment, then asked what it meant.

"That's the way it is," said the captain. He was looking out a window. "I expect three of them have one set of ideas about Custer, all favorable, and four have another. You must decide for yourself."

I did not hesitate. "I've always been for a fair fight," I said, and put my bedroll down beside the

three. Captain Thomas did not turn around to notice my decision.

That night at mess I met the other seven officers, all of my rank, with whom I was to share quarters. My opposite number in I Troop turned out to be a Lieutenant Alvin Thadius. He was short and chunked, with round red cheeks like apples, and he hailed from Ohio. I took a liking to him at once, but I did not realize how deep the currents ran until we returned to the Custer drawing room to bed down. When Thadius saw where I had put my roll he said he hoped that did not mean I had been taken in by Autie Custer the way half the country had. I replied that I disliked passing judgment on a dead man.

"There are five troops dead," said Thadius. "And they have passed judgment, wherever they are, on the man who brought them to it!" In an instant he was as ruffled up as a prairie chicken at mating. "He disobeyed orders, he would not listen to his scouts—Bloody Knife told him they would never see the set of the sun that day. But he took six hundred men with him to the slaughter!"

The others were watching me as I sat with one boot already drawn off. I was not on firm ground, for Thadius had arrived two weeks before me and doubtless had more of the facts. But he was not a year older than I, and I resolved to be as stubborn as he was quick-tempered.

"Reno failed to support him," I said. "He heard firing over the hill but he dug in. An officer may think first of the safety of his own command, but not a gentleman."

I regretted this as soon as the words were out of my mouth. Thadius came to his feet with his round cheeks redder than ever.

"A butcher is no gentleman!" he cried.

This stung me to the raw. I hauled off my other boot and stood. "It takes a gentleman to recognize one," I said.

He started for me with a lunge and we would have had a bobbery then and there had not Lieutenant Nokes, who was a rather sentimental lad, come between us. The eight of us went to bed in silence, four across from four. As I lay accustoming my bones to the plank floor and my mind to this inauspicious beginning, the glass eyes of the grizzlies gleamed down at me, reflecting the light of the dying fire. I tossed and turned for several hours, and I could hear Alvin Thadius doing likewise.

By the first blizzard I found what I had joined. It was not the Seventh Cavalry, nor a fighting force of any kind, but an unruly mass of men divided into two camps. Five hundred recruits and thirty green officers had come from the East too late in the season to train properly, and with them they had brought along the bitterness felt back home about the Little Bighorn. Every troop was split, I Troop included. There were five hundred remounts in the stables, too, and it was hard to tell which were the more cantankerous, animals or men. Only those who had been with Custer —officers such as Captains Benteen and Thomas, Lieutenants Varnum and DeRudio—held their peace. All the long howling winter matters worsened. Discipline became nearly impossible to maintain. The recruits would slip guard at night and cross the Missouri ice to Bismarck to drink and brawl among themselves. A patrol located a little lake near the fort in which warm springs melted the ice along the shore, and here the big pike lay so thick the men could heave them out in piles with pitchforks. But quarrels over dividing them soon stopped the "fishing."

Discipline became nearly impossible to maintain. The recruits would slip guard at night to drink and brawl among themselves.

Even Major Reno's attempt to divert the men only increased tensions. It had been General Custer's policy to permit "theatricals" now and then, in which the men dressed up and performed skits and dances and so on. But the theatricals that winter ended with the first. One of the pieces announced was a recitation by Tommy Gudge, our Troop I bugler, a boy of eighteen, and when Tommy stood onstage to recite, the Custer-haters had put him up to doing one of Mr. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's latest poems, called "The Revenge of Rain-in-the-Face." This was based on the yarn that when the general lay fallen, his heart had been cut out of him by savages. Toward the end of the poem Tommy had worked up such a head of steam that his voice fairly cracked on these lines:

"Revenge!" cried Rain-in-the-Face,
"Revenge upon all the race
Of the White Chief with yellow hair!"

At this point a sergeant in the rear rose up and shouted "Revenge!" himself, and in a flash the fists were flying. A riot was averted only by calling in the guard and banging a few heads with carbine butts.

Fort Lincoln that winter of '76–'77 was a haunted post. It seemed that all the dead were with us still, making up an unseen regiment, the old Seventh, the immortal Seventh, mocking the new one with the memory of its gallantry. It preyed on the mind.

I well recall poor Nokes, for instance. We eight lieutenants still lay separated on the floor of the Custer drawing room those endless nights with the wind helling down out of Canada across the plains and wailing at the eaves. One night we were awakened by Nokes, who jumped out of his roll and commenced to yell at us.

"Hear that singing? Hear it? That's the wives and Mrs. Custer singing as they did the day the news came, crying and singing in this room. I can't stand it. Tell them to stop. Tell them to stop!"

And he began to sing at the top of his voice, " 'E'en though a cross it be, nearer, my God, to Thee!' " It was a terrifying thing, of course, at such an hour, and Allenberry and I seized Nokes and tried to calm him, telling him it was only the wind.

"No, no, it's the wives of the dead. It's the widows singing." Nokes howled. "I can't stand it!"

We finally got the unfortunate lad back in his roll, but we had to hold him down all night, and in the morning took him to the surgeons because he still shook and did not seem to have control of his limbs. Nokes stayed with them and in the spring was shipped Back East to a hospital. I have not heard of him since.

One night in March I learned what lay behind Captain Thomas's reserve. I was officer of the guard, and while inspecting the various sentry boxes saw a light in the stables. Knowing the farriers were all asleep or carousing over in Bismarck, I went to investigate. To my surprise I found the captain currying a small bay horse by the light of a lantern. He told me it was General Custer's horse Dandy.

"How can that be, Captain?" I asked. "I understood that neither man nor horse escaped."

"He had two—Vic and this one," said the captain. "On the morning of the battle he took his choice of the two to ride that day. Vic was younger and he took him. That's how this one comes to be here."

I went around to the head and looked more closely at the bay. I must admit my flesh crawled, because though he should have been a ghost horse he was very much alive, with lots of spunk in his eyes and the way he carried his head. Though small for cavalry, he belonged at the head of a column. Captain Thomas went on currying and telling me about him. Dandy had been the general's favorite, and had been bought by the government in Kansas for one hundred forty dollars. He could run down a deer and no horse was better alongside the rump of a buffalo bull. When I asked why the captain felt he had to care for him, he replied that feelings were so high, even among the farriers, that most of them would not lay hands on a pet of Custer's.

I commented that that was pretty low, but he said such sympathies were not confined to the farriers. Last fall, before I came, there had been a subscription started among the officers to buy the horse from the government and ship him to Mrs. Custer as a memorial. All the old officers had paid in, but when most of the new arrivals refused, Major Reno returned the money. He would not send Dandy away unless commissioned names were listed, for he did not want the general's lady to suspect what a state the regiment was in.

It occurred to me that this might be a good time to ask Captain John Thomas about the Little Bighorn and his part in it. I knew nothing about the man except that he had been brevetted colonel during the war, having command of a regiment in Virginia after the cavalry fight at Brandy Station. He was one of those officers growing old in the service, with little to look forward to except gray hairs, which he already had, and retirement at major's rank.

"Captain," I said, "do you mind my asking you about the battle?"

"Ask if you like, Peddie," he said, working away with a comb. "But I have nothing to tell. I was

His face betrayed a terrible look, as though his skin had been flayed to ribbons and I could see clear through to his vitals.

not present. I should have been, since I had I Troop then, as now. But before we took the field an officer was needed to conduct some Cheyenne prisoners to Oklahoma and resettle them there. Custer happened to pick me, I do not know why. Captain Keogh took I Troop in my place, and was killed. I could not return to Fort Abe till July, and then it was all over. I met the wounded when they came down by steamer."

"Oh," I said. Then I asked what no man should ask of another under such circumstances, but I was only twenty-three years of age. "How do you feel about it, Captain?"

For a moment he was silent. Then he turned to me and his face betrayed a terrible look. It was as though his skin had been flayed to ribbons and I could see clear through to his vitals.

"How would you feel?" he asked.

I could not answer. I had no idea how I would feel. But I could see, as if by lightning, how the man must have been tormented.

On the one hand he must have hated Custer for sending him away and denying him the chance a soldier seldom has—the chance to die a hero. That part of him must have blamed the general for the disaster, despised him as much as did young Alvin Thadius and many of the recruits.

On the other hand, the instinct to survive is strong in every man, so he must have been grateful to his commander for having spared his life. And all that gratitude must have made him stand at times on the side of those who worshipped Custer for his daring and leadership. The awful struggle for allegiance in the regiment, which they could fight out among them, had been dueling on a year in John Thomas, and he bore it alone.

When he saw my confusion, the captain looked away and laid a gentle hand on Dandy's neck.

"I am just like this horse, Peddie," he said. "Another went in his place and he did not see that day, either. If he can stand it, then I can. And I can care for him if others will not."

I had to leave the stables and be by myself in the cold clear night. Sudden insight into the soul of a fellow human being often matures one in a minute as much as does a full year's campaign.

Spring came. The ice went out of the Missouri and Major Reno took the Seventh into the gumbo mud daily to train the spleen out of it. The Sioux had left the agencies now. Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse were north behind the mountains and sent word down they intended scalping every white man in North Dakota. So the Seventh trained, and at least learned how to get on and off a horse and which was the business end of a Colt and Springfield. We knew we would take the field, but no man could say when he would return or if. Not many of the old Seventh had, and this one was scarce its equal.

On 14 May 1877 we marched through the west gate of Fort Abe. I can still hear the leather slapping and gear clinking and fifes squealing a tune—not "Garryowen," which was the regimental song when Autie Custer led it, but "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The last verses of that song I will never forget, for they took on that day a meaning far beyond their words:

Full many a name our banners bore
Of former deeds of daring,
But they were of the days of yore,
In which we had no sharing;
But now our laurels freshly won
With the old ones shall entwined be,
Still worthy of his sire each son,
Sweet girl I left behind me.

Few men have seen the plains and prairies, the mountains and rivers and spaces of the Dakota country as it was then, as God made it, and I thank Him for the privilege of admiring his handiwork.

One day we encountered a hailstorm with hailstones as big as hickory nuts. The horses thought they were being beaten.

We went up to Fort Buford, crossed the Missouri, and then went up the Yellowstone, taking four weeks at it. The ground had not yet started to thaw and the nights were cold. One day we encountered a hailstorm on Froze-to-Death Creek, with hailstones as big as hickory nuts, and the horses, hit on the hocks by them, thought they were being beaten and became frantic. Another day we went over a rise and before us were buffalo all the way to the ho-

rizon. We estimated the herd at thirteen thousand. After the first rains the prairie was covered with grass plover running in pairs. The sickle-billed curlew whistled all day, hovering overhead so still you could drop them with a shot. Little green and purple anemones were the first flowers to come out.

We camped a few days at Sunday Creek in an abandoned cantonment of logs with dirt roofs before heading north to seek Sitting Bull in the mountains. But here Major Reno sent for Captain Thomas, and when the latter returned he said I Troop was detached for special duty. We were to take our four wagons, with mules and drivers, and mount up at once. F. F. Gerard, the scout, would accompany us. He did not say what the duty would be, and neither Thadius nor I inquired. We left that afternoon and marched up the Yellowstone for a week.

The country here was wilder than could be imagined. We saw elk in bands as large as five hundred. We camped among cottonwoods six feet around the trunk. The men killed some beaver and Gerard showed them how to cook the tails. They were delicious, resembling cold roast pork in flavor. Since we saw no hostiles, the men enjoyed themselves as much as the rate of the march and their own cussedness allowed. It was discovered that the wagons were being hauled empty except for a collection of hammers, saws, planes, and nails.

We crossed the Yellowstone near the mouth of the Bighorn, and here an unpleasant incident showed that I Troop was still composed of boys, not men. The river being high, we slowed the horses behind a skiff, and the lariat of Thadius's came loose. The current wound it around the animal's legs and downstream he went. I dived in under him to cut him free with my knife but became tangled myself, and we would both have drowned had not Thadius come in and finished the job, so that the horse brought us ashore clinging to his headstall. But when, having swallowed my pride along with several gallons of snow-water, I tried to thank him for the rescue, he said he had been interested only in rescuing the citizens from the cost of a remount.

"We have come to the Little Bighorn to rebury the men and mark their graves," the captain said.

"Why, damn you!" I burst out.

"Why, damn you both!" Captain Thomas had come up, mad enough to eat snake. "I will have officers with me, not jabbering squaws. Whether you realize it or not, Sitting Bull has scouts down here, I know he has, and he will have our heads up on a lodge if we don't soldier."

He saw some of the troopers grinning like apes.

"And that applies to you men," he said. "Now get those mules and wagons over—if Crazy Horse doesn't make a troop out of this one, I will!"

There was considerable settling down after that. Not that those for Custer were friendlier toward those against, but each was more considerate of his own skin. We were three hundred miles from Fort Abe by then and half that from the regiment. The earth might have swallowed all of I Troop up and not a living soul the wiser.

The next day, to prove the captain right, we saw our first hostiles, a party of three at a distance. F. F. Gerard asked to use the captain's glasses. He was a small, wizened man who wore buckskin and possessed a sense of humor despite the fact that his teeth caused him pain, doubtless due to his diet over many years on the plains. After a long look he said they were Oglala, and if he was not mistaken one was old Red Moon, a chief not overly fond of cavalry.

We marched another three days, sighting savages on each of them. Captain Thomas gave orders there would be no bugling or shooting or fires at night. We marched up a creek called the Rosebud and found wickiups with skins still tied on them. We also found warnings in Cheyenne scratched in sandstone on the bluffs along the creek. That night we learned form Sergeant Biersdorf where we were going. He had been that way the year before. We were going back to the Little Bighorn.

Midmorning of 25 June, a year to the very day after the battle, I Troop came up a hill in columns of twos, wagons to the rear, and Captain Thomas threw up his hand.

"There it is," he said simply.

I heard nothing in his voice, but I could not help conjecture what was in his mind.

Thadius and I looked down a valley. To the west it widened out in swells toward the Bighorns, high and blue. On three of the knolls, C, E, F, and I Troops had

stood a year ago that day and given up their lives. Southward were the high bluffs and deep ravines where Reno fought cut off. Below, a stream sparkled in the sun. It was the Little Bighorn.

"We have come to meet Colonel Mike Sheridan, General Phil's brother, with Captain Nowland and a party of Ree scouts," the captain went on. "The dead could not be buried properly last year because there was no time. We are to rebury the men in one place and mark their graves. The officers are to be placed in caskets we must build. We will then take them in the wagons back to Fort Union, where the infantry will escort them on to Fort Abe and the railroad. In the East their families are awaiting them. We will then rejoin the regiment."

Thus I Troop learned why it had returned to the Little Bighorn. Camp was pitched near the stream. In the afternoon Colonel Sheridan and Captain Nowland arrived from Fort Miles, guided by two Rees—Horns-in-Front and Two Strikes—who had been with the Seventh the year before. They had sighted many Sioux in parties of various size, and asked Gerard's opinion. The scout replied he doubted they would trouble us while scattered, but if banded up they might get notions.

The duty was commenced at once, and sad duty it was. The troopers had been laid to rest where they had fallen, scattered over a lot of ground and buried shallow under heaps of stones. The wolves had been their usual busy selves. And where the valley had been thick with dust from drought and hoofs a year before now the grass was stirrup-high and flowers were everywhere. The officers were easier to find. By each one a length of lodge pole had been driven in the earth, with a Roman numeral on it, and Captain Nowland had a chart showing the numbers and decorations.

Captain Thomas ordered the wagons driven into a half circle so that we could make a stand with our backs to the Little Bighorn.

Autie Custer's grave was covered with a basket from a Sioux travois, pinned down with stakes. The general's heart may have broken when he saw his regiment was lost, but I can state positively it was not cut out of him.

It was a quiet camp that night, no fires, no calls, and guards out all around. In the morning my detail began digging graves near the Little Bighorn and bringing the departed comrades to them, while that under Thadius made roughboard coffins out of green willow for the officers. Human nature being what it is, the men got shorter with one another as the day dragged on. Relics found in the grass stuck under their hides like arrows—canteens, a ring, cartridges, knives, boots, gutta-percha buttons from the sleeves of blouses. Once two troopers squared off with fists high until I stopped them. Like as not there would have been a general ruckus had it not been for the Sioux. There were fifty or more of them in evidence now, sitting their ponies out on the knolls a mile off like wooden Indians, not live ones. But they were live, all right.

In the afternoon Captain Thomas sent Gerard and the Rees out to circle. When they returned a parley was held. Gerard reported another hundred Sioux hiding in the hollows, and some Cheyenne.

"They're banding, Cap'n," he said. "When Red Moon gets enough parties in, he'll come for us. He was here last year and he knows how."

The scout talked some Ree and sign to Two Strikes, then pulled a blade of grass. "He claims this valley is medicine ground to the Sioux after what they did to Longhair. They ain't going to let anybody dig him up and take him away. Any buck who dies on this ground goes up there on a real fast pony." He pointed to the sky. "Can you follow that, Cap'n?"

"I can," Thomas said. "When will they be ready, Frank?"

"By tomorrow."

Meantime, Colonel Sheridan had been pacing. He was a tall man with a spade beard and had been personally sent from Washington by President Grant on this mission. Now he stared off at the Sioux.

"History repeating itself," he said, almost to himself. "Next year my brother can order a command to come for us as we have come for the others." He faced Captain Thomas. "I am no Indian fighter, Captain, I admit it frankly. But I do recognize odds if Custer did not, and it seems clear there may be another slaughter here tomorrow. If we abandon the wagons and leave during the night we can have a start on them by morning. What do you propose?"

John Thomas turned his face toward the Sioux and we could not see it. I believed I was the only man who understood his terrible position. In this very place a year

before, the commander to whom he owed both gratitude and enmity, George Armstrong Custer, had made his decision. Now, under almost the same circumstances, John Thomas had to make his. Finally, he answered.

"I will do that if you order it, Colonel. But we came out here to take some brave men home. I would hate to lose this troop, but I would hate to leave the general and the others here again. If we tuck our tails between our legs, the Sioux will think their medicine is stronger in this Territory than ours. I think we should leave here in good order with our duty done, or not at all."

No one had anything to say. But even Two Strikes and Horns-In-Front got the drift from Gerard's face.

Colonel Sheridan pulled off his gauntlets. "I have heard about you in St. Paul, Captain. Has the fact that you were not present here last year influenced your tactics now?"

I held my breath, but the captain met his eyes squarely.

"Sir, it has not," he said.

Colonel Sheridan nodded. "I have also heard rumors about the condition and morale of the Seventh, but I know nothing about this troop. Will they fight?"

"I don't know, Colonel," said Captain Thomas. "But they must find out sometime, as we all must."

Colonel Sheridan slapped his gauntlets together. "Very well. When can we be finished here?"

"By noon tomorrow."

The colonel turned his back as though to indicate the responsibility rested now on other shoulders, and the parley ended. Captain Thomas ordered the four wagons driven into a half circle so that we could make a stand behind them with our backs to the Little Bighorn. Seeing this, I Troop knew it was to stay.

"This horse was left behind the way you were," the captain said. "But he came two hundred miles to prove he bears no grudge."

That night Captain Thomas ordered as many fires built as the men wished, as if to show the Sioux we were not perturbed about them. The troopers gathered around each blaze to talk in low tones and calculate our chances on the morrow. We were five officers, three scouts, four skinners, and forty-eight men, a total of sixty against no one knew how many hostiles, but the odds were reckoned at more than six to one. The consensus was that Red Moon had kept the bulk of his band concealed to trap us, as Sitting Bull had done successfully. We might stand them off for several hours, but the outcome was assured. The Custer haters said we were to fight the second Battle of the Little Bighorn, and that Longhair had led us to it in death as surely as he had led the others in life. Many troopers, convinced they would not see another night, turned messages and valuables over to their comrades in the hope that some would survive.

I took no part in this grim vigil, but said my prayers as usual and turned in beside Thadius, who shared a tent with me. I may have expected he would make some peaceful overture, but he did not. The situation seemed unreal to me—being on this hallowed battlefield a year later, the presence of the enemy in overwhelming numbers, the preparations for a stand which must end in tragedy. I fell asleep thinking only that I would never have the chance to display my moustachio in Baltimore.

The day dawned clear. After a cooked breakfast tents were struck, canteens filled, men posted on guard between the wagons, and the skinners turned into horse holders at the rear. Captain Thomas ordered that the remainder complete the work we had been sent to do. At this there was muttering that he had gone mad, but my detail proceeded to bring in the last of the heroes and prepare graves while Thadius's finished the carpentry. Except for the scrape of shovel against stone and the bang of hammers, all was silence. There was no sign of Sioux. They would come when they were ready.

They came near noon, all at once, pouring out of the hollows by the hundreds, spreading out like a swarm. Still a mile away but riding toward us were the brightly painted Cheyenne, who were better horsemen, riding in wide circles and sliding under the necks of their ponies to show what we would have to shoot at. I estimate Red Moon had at least four hundred. And there were many waving carbines, weapons they had taken from our fallen.

We had just filled in the last place of honor, outside the perimeter of the wagons, and started running back to form up. I re-

member troopers' faces staring, figures in blue standing as though rooted. Then Alvin Thadius came on the run to meet me, holding something in his hand and crying like a child. He held up a dirt-stained triangle of cloth, which I recognized as a guidon he must have found with one of the officers.

"You see this, Peddie," he yelled. "This is what he did to them and what he'll do to us. And before I die, dear God, I'll have it out with you!"

And as I came up short, thunderstruck that this could happen now, Thadius was on me using his fists like clubs. My corporal came to pull him off and was pitched upon by someone else at once, and in seconds most of I Troop was battling it out beyond the wagons, standing and swinging or rolling in the grass among the markers at one another's throats, the line of defense gone and the Sioux not half a mile away. I do not recall an incident like it in the annals of the United States Cavalry. Had something even more unlooked-for not occurred we would have been massacred, every living one.

Thadius and I were at grips near the right front wagon and suddenly I heard the high-pitched yelp of Frank Gerard.

"Look, Cap'n—look yonder. They know that horse—blow the charge! Blow the charge!"

And all at once the bell of Tommy Gudge's bugle blew the charge, and the most stirring of all calls was carried above the desperate men and out over the valley. It was so unexpected that men stopped blows in midair or rose from the ground to see. The obstinate lad from Ohio crawled off me and we stood ourselves.

Over the knolls came a little bay horse upon the lope. When the notes of the bugle reached his ears, he pricked them up, then went into a gallop toward us, right across the front of the swarm of Sioux. And the whole four hundred of the savages stopped their ponies and their yelling. Gerard was right. They did know that horse. They could not believe their eyes any more than we. To them it was a spirit horse with a spirit rider on his back—more powerful medicine than mortal men, red or white, could ever make.

Right between the Sioux and us he galloped, with no sound but the drumming of his hoofs, and he came between the wagons to a halt, blowing and nickering. The Sioux forgotten, we gathered around him. He was all dirt and foam, his eyes sunken and his ribs nearly through his hide. In some way he had broken loose at Fort Abe, and trailing lariat and picket pin had come two hundred miles over mountains and rivers and prairies, had found his way back to the Little Bighorn where he was the year before and where his master now lay in a box of willow.

Captain Thomas leaped down from his wagon and stood beside him for a time. Then he took off his hat.

"Let there be no more fighting among us," he said at length. "I know what has been in your minds. Some men were picked a year ago to make history here. They made it and they will not be forgotten. But what you bear is a grudge against your luck. You came to the regiment too late and could not share their glory."

He put his hand upon the mane of the little bay. I realized that what he had to say was for his own sake as well as ours.

"This horse was left behind the way you were. But he came two hundred miles to prove he bears no grudge. He missed one fight and he intends to see he does not miss another. If he can do as much, why, so can we. We will now harness these wagons and mount up and march out of here in good order."

For a minute all stood, not a dry eye among us. Then a cheer rang out and troopers shook hands, as did Alvin Thadius and I. If the souls of the departed were present that day, looking down from the blue sky on that scene in the green valley, it must have lifted their hearts.

If the souls of the departed were present that day, looking down on that scene in the valley, it must have lifted their hearts.

Mules were harnessed, Tommy Gudge blew boots and saddles, and I Troop came into column. While the Sioux still sat a quarter of a mile away, believing we had joined forces with the Great Beyond, which in a way we had, Captain Thomas threw his hand forward and we marched past them out of the valley as though on parade, our guidon fluttering and our heads high. At the head of the column stepped the little bay.

So there was a kind of Second Battle of the Little Bighorn after all, which was won without a shot being fired. Dandy was returned to Fort Abe with his master and the other heroes. When I Troop re-

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joined the regiment in the north and related the foregoing, the subscription for him was raised at once. One hundred forty dollars was paid the government, and the general's horse was shipped East to "The Girl He'd Left Behind Him." From her home in Monroe, Michigan, Mrs. Custer sent a moving letter of thanks. It may interest the reader to know that Dandy became the horse of Autie Custer's old father, who was over seventy then, and together they headed up temperance processions and Fourth of July parades for many years.

As for the breach in the ranks of the Seventh Regiment, it was wholly healed, as evidenced by ensuing victories at Wounded Knee and against the Nez Percé at Bear Paw.

Alexander Peddie was unable, in Dakota Days, *to describe the action at Bear Paw to which he alludes, since prior to it he was transferred to Fort Huachuca in Arizona. Nor does he mention Captain John Thomas again in his volume. Records of the Adjutant General disclose, however, that the captain, conducting himself gallantly at the head of I Troop, was killed in action against the Nez Percé. Subsequently a recommendation for the posthumous award of the Congressional Medal of Honor was made in his case, but the citation was never approved. Letters of the day reveal, ironically, that sentiment in both Congress and the War Department was against it and several others on the grounds that too-generous award of the medal had been made after the Battle of the Little Bighorn.*

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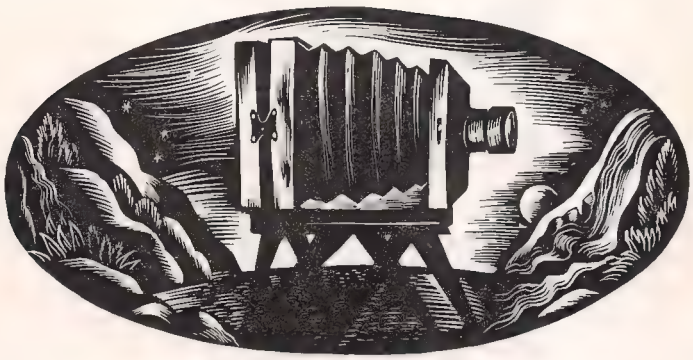

BLACK BART

AMONG THE GREAT highwaymen of romantic legend, Robin Hood had his merry men and Alfred Noyes's nameless hero "came riding, riding, riding–up to the old inn door."

Black Bart did not resemble these immortals in the remotest way–he had no men, least of all merry ones, nor even a horse, except for shank's mare–yet in an eight-year period he made a name for himself (literally) and carved a deep niche in Gilded Age California history as the harmless, horseless, whimsical nemesis of Wells Fargo and bandit laureate of the Mother Lode country.

When police and private detectives confronted him outside his hotel in San Francisco in November 1883, he was using the name C. E. Bolton. To his captors he looked nothing like the down-and-out, shifty-eyed, Dynamite Dick variety of desperado they were accustomed to. Instead here stood, leaning on a cane but militarily erect, a kindly, graying old duffer with a grand walrus mustache and a jaunty derby hat on his head, dressed to the nines in a tailor-cut salt-and-pepper suit, waistcoat, and cravat.

BY GRIFFIN OLIVER

He appeared every inch the prosperous mining man he claimed to be. And if he wasn't, who *was* he?

In harmony with true legendry, in which little is in focus and fiction rules fact, only the eight years of Black Bart's outlaw career have any historic documentation. The rest of his life—the beginning and end of it, especially—is a take-your-pick grab bag of speculation, supposition, and simple guesswork.

His name was probably Charles E. Boles, but where he came from and when have never been nailed down. When he surrendered in 1883 he appeared to be in his mid- to late fifties and therefore was probably born in the period of 1825–28. California historian Richard Dillon gives Norfolk, England, as his probable place of birth; others name New York, Boston, and the Midwest. He claimed to have served as an officer in the Civil War, but records seem to indicate he enlisted in the Union Army in Decatur, Illinois, in 1862, and, as a sergeant, was wounded in a Georgia battle in 1864.

No one knows when he came to California, either. He said he came west at the age of ten, but he also claimed to have been a Forty-niner. In fact, he may have journeyed west three times—the first time as a youngster with his family; the second as a would-be prospector following the great gold rush; the third in the early 1870s when, as a failed farmer and drummer he deserted his wife and children in the Midwest (assuming, as some historians have claimed, that he had a wife and children and that they lived in the Midwest) and fled to a region familiar to him—the Mother Lode country of northern California.

Chances are he actually did some kind of mining in California before his debut in recorded history in the summer of 1875. Whatever he undertook, however, must have failed, and there is a hint that he developed a particular antipathy toward the prevailing giant of the western freight business. When he began robbing stagecoaches he selected Wells Fargo coaches exclusively. And when, during the course of one of these robberies, a female passenger threw her purse out the coach window, Boles returned it politely, thanking the owner and saying, "I honor only the good office of Wells Fargo."

When Black Bart began robbing stagecoaches he selected Wells Fargo coaches exclusively.

(More than likely, however, Boles preferred Wells Fargo for the same reason Willie Sutton preferred banks: it was where you found the money. Wells Fargo had been founded in San Francisco in 1852 and grew rapidly from a small, efficient business guarding bullion from the California goldfields to the east, to a corporate monolith buying out all its competitors, including the Butterfield Overland Mail in 1860, operating banks and a mail service and creating a monopoly on long- and short-distance freight west of the Mississippi. If you shipped anything—mail, goods, ore, bullion, cash, or passengers, in or from California in the prerailroad era, chances are you shipped by Wells Fargo.)

Boles's first recorded act of road agentry occurred on July 25, 1875, in Mark Twain's "Celebrated Jumping Frog" region of Calaveras County, southeast of Sacramento. In a daring and imaginative act, Boles simply stepped out of the brush, aimed a shotgun, and stopped a Wells Fargo stage near the town of Copperopolis. The double barrels provided the main instruction but Boles's appearance alone must have given the driver, a man named John Shine, pause: Here stood a bandit wearing a long linen duster, a flour sack with eye holes cut from it over his head, and other sacks bound around his feet. Moreover, the robber appeared to have partners lurking in the bushes, for he gestured to the edge of the trail where several guns appeared to be aimed toward the coach and, pointing at the driver, said to his phantom cohorts, "If he dares shoot, give him a volley!"

The driver did not shoot and as Shine's five passengers waited—no doubt fearful for their lives and possessions—Boles instructed Shine to "throw down the box" and "drive on," then cracked open the stage's familiar green-painted lockbox with a hatchet, taking an undetermined amount of cash and gold. When the driver returned to the scene later he found that the "guns" sticking from the bushes were merely whittled sticks. The bandit had acted alone and had escaped, on foot, without a trace, his bagged feet leaving no tracks.

Boles may have robbed other stages in the next two years or managed to live on the proceeds of his first heist. Whatever the case his return, on August 3, 1877, was auspicious. He kept his flour sack disguise but dropped the ploy about having comrades in the bushes and, most significant, first introduced the name that made him immortal in Old West history: Black Bart.

Again he stopped a Wells Fargo stage, this time shifting his opera-

tion to the coastal area north of San Francisco between Point Arena and the Russian River. From the strongbox he took a bit over three hundred dollars in cash and some jewelry. When the county sheriff came to investigate the scene of the robbery, the box was found to contain a waybill, on the back of which, in a weird backhanded writing, the highwayman had left a clever message. It read:

I've labored long and hard
for bread
For honor and for riches
But on my corns too long
you've trod
You fine-haired sons of
bitches.

The signature below the verse read "Black Bart, the Po8."

A year later, Boles-as-Bart struck again—both with a Wells Fargo robbery and a poem. On July 25, 1878, the stage heading to Oroville, north of Sacramento, was robbed of $379 in cash, a diamond ring, and a gold watch. This time, the poem left in the box seemed a bit more philosophical and even a bit fatalistic:

Here I lay me down to sleep
to wait the coming morrow
Perhaps success, perhaps
defeat
and everlasting sorrow
Let come what will, I'll try it
on
My condition can't be worse
And if there's money in that
box
'Tis munny in my purse.

Boles's road agentry territory, no little distance for a man on foot, stretched from Sonora, east of Stockton in the Sierra Nevada foothills, to nearby Copperopolis and the San Andreas–Calaveras County region, and as far west as the Russian River above Santa Rosa. His robberies followed a pattern: he selected rises on the road on which the horse teams had to slow, enabling him to step from the brush into the roadway, his shotgun leveled. He rarely said more than "Throw down the box" and "Get along, now," the latter phrase after he had taken the box, or (in the case of the strongboxes bolted to the floor of the coach under the driver's feet) smashed it and taken its contents.

BLACK BART WAS NEVER KNOWN TO FIRE THE SHOTGUN HE CARRIED AND LATER TOLD AUTHORITIES HE NEVER LOADED IT.

He was never known to actually fire the shotgun and later told authorities he never loaded it.

His "take" varied widely and although one robbery is said to have netted him nearly five thousand dollars, the average score was under five hundred dollars (even that a princely sum in 1880). On one occasion, when the lockbox had a paltry few dollars in it, Boles left this good-natured verse:

So here I've stood while wind
and rain
Have set the trees a-sobbin'
And risked my life for that
damne stage
That wasn't worth the
robbin'.

Bay area newspapers, especially feisty young William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner,* loved Black Bart and depicted him as waging a David and Goliath battle against Wells Fargo. Others were not so amused: California's governor, William Irwin, announced a reward of three hundred dollars "for the capture and conviction of the bandit known as Black Bart." The federal government got into the act, authorizing the post office (which had had some mail taken in the robberies) to add two hundred dollars to the reward. And Wells Fargo, least amused of them all, added its own three hundred dollars and printed posters announcing "$800.00 Reward! Arrest Stage Robber!"

The wanted posters carried a facsimile reprint of Bart's poems and his signature, but despite these measures, neither the reward money nor the posters brought in a single clue as to Bart's identity or whereabouts.

What brought the bandit to bay involved the combination of two clever and persistent investigators and a fateful mistake.

James B. Hume, Wells Fargo's chief detective, had an impressive record as a California and Nevada lawman before he joined the freight company in 1873. In both appearance and actions he had all the characteristics of a model western lawman: he was tall, handsome, modest, reticent, quietly efficient, as dogged as Inspector Javert in pursuit of Jean Valjean, and resourceful in his use of modern detection methods, including the new science of ballistics.

Hume had been trailing Boles almost from the beginning of the highwayman's career. He visited the sites of all the robberies and patiently put together some valuable information. Witnesses in settlements near the scenes of the robberies described seeing a polite, friendly man in his fifties, about five foot eight or ten in

height with brownish gray hair, a fierce gray mustache and matching goatee, carrying a bedroll (which Hume correctly guessed carried his duster, flour sacks, shotgun, hatchet, pry bar, and loot), passing through on foot and quickly disappearing. Hume made special note of the reports by several witnesses that the man's boots were neatly slit at the toes as if to relieve corns—small wonder, given the territory the bandit covered in his hikes from the Sierras nearly to the Pacific Coast.

Another piece of information Hume placed in his meticulous dossier on Black Bart derived from a Wells Fargo robbery on July 13, 1882, when the stage driver, a man named George Hackett, claimed to have fired a shot at the fleeing robber. The bullet tore off the flour sack mask the man wore, Hackett said, and he got a glimpse of "a man with gray hair and a big mustache."

But Hume's first real break in his investigation occurred on November 3, 1883, when Bart robbed a Wells Fargo coach headed from the town of Sonora to Milton, in Calaveras County. The driver, Reason McConnell, described how the bandit ordered him to unhitch the team and take the animals down the road a piece. Then, the driver said, he heard the robber taking an ax to the strongbox and escaping down the mountainside with $550 in cash and some $4,000 in "amalgam"—a mixture of silver and mercury. McConnell said he took a shot at the bandit and thought he had drawn blood.

County sheriff Ben Thorne and San Francisco detective Harry N. Morse, whom Hume had hired to assist on the case, quickly came to the scene of the robbery and followed the trail taken by Black Bart. Along the road and in the brush the men picked up several items dropped by the bandit—a derby hat, some sugar and crackers, a belt, a binocular case, a magnifying glass, a razor, and two flour sacks.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BLACK BART WHEN HE GOT OUT OF PRISON REMAINS A MYSTERY—HE PROMPTLY DISAPPEARED.

More important than these, Morse found a bloodstained handkerchief bearing the laundry mark F.X.O.7.

In an astonishingly swift example of frontier justice, a judge's gavel and a prison door slammed on Black Bart eighteen days after his robbery of the Sonora-Milton stage.

Hume and his man on the scene, Morse, were real detectives in a time when law work, outside the Pinkerton Agency and Wells Fargo operations, consisted principally of forming posses, serving warrants with a six-gun, and preventing mobs from lynching the miscreants. Few lawmen in 1883 put their nose on the carpet and searched for clues in the manner of a Sherlock Holmes (who had not yet surfaced—his first adventure was published in 1887) and not many did the legwork that ended Black Bart's escapades.

Harry Morse's career as a lawman surpassed even that of his boss, the dauntless James Hume. Morse, a forty-eight-year-old New Yorker and one-time merchant seaman, had come to California as a Forty-niner and had been elected sheriff of Alameda County in 1863. He served seven terms, survived several gunfights, had a reputation as an expert tracker, long-distance pursuer, and one who used detection as well as his guns and fists in maintaining law and order in his jurisdiction. In 1874 he assisted in the search for the notorious outlaw Tiburcio Vasquez, which led to the bandit's arrest and execution, and after his fourteen years as sheriff he set up a detective agency in San Francisco that eventually employed sixty carefully selected men. So great was Morse's reputation as a manhunter and detective that Hume hired him expressly to help solve the Black Bart case.

Hume and Morse knew that the laundry mark, their only genuine clue to the twenty-nine Wells Fargo stage robberies they attributed to the man they knew only as Black Bart, could unlock the case. So Morse spent a week visiting every laundry in the Bay area—nearly a hundred of them. He struck pay dirt when he dropped into the California Laundry, which shared space with a tobacco shop on Bush Street in San Francisco. The proprietor identified the F.X.O.7. handkerchief mark as that assigned to one C. E. Bolton, a mining man who lived in a hotel called Webb House on Second Street.

With the help of San Francisco police and with the laundry man's description of Bolton, Morse staked out the hotel. He did not have long to wait. Bolton emerged from his rooms (the date here is uncertain, but probably about November 12, nine or ten days after the Calaveras County robbery) and Morse confronted his quarry. The detective later described his man as "elegantly dressed," carrying a cane, and wearing "a natty little derby hat, a diamond pin, a large diamond ring on his little finger, and a heavy gold watch and chain." He observed that, "One would have taken him for a gentleman who had made a

fortune and was enjoying it. He looked anything but a robber."

Bolton gave his age as fifty-five and, at first, said simply that he was a mining man.

There being no Miranda warnings in 1883, nor need for a search warrant, Bolton was placed under arrest and his rooms searched. Morse found what he needed: a linen duster and other clothing bearing the California Laundry's telltale mark.

Bolton (whose real name he apparently gave to authorities as Charles E. Boles) was returned to Calaveras County for arraignment. He confessed to being the Wells Fargo nemesis Black Bart and took exception only to being described as a "common criminal" ("I am a gentleman," he insisted). He cooperated with his captors and the court, leading lawmen to his cache in the Sierra foothills where Wells Fargo recovered at least some of its money, amalgam, and jewelry.

Boles, convicted of a single count of armed robbery—that of the Sonora-Milton holdup—was sentenced in a San Andreas court on November 17 to six years' imprisonment. Newspapers speculating on the light sentence guessed that the court had taken into consideration the age of the defendant, the fact that no evidence existed that he had ever fired his shotgun or robbed a stage passenger, and that he had unstintingly cooperated with authorities.

He entered San Quentin Prison on November 21, 1883, served four years and two months of his sentence, and earned an early, good-behavior release on January 21, 1888.

Boles, now at least sixty, promptly disappeared.

What became of Black Bart, the Po8, most celebrated of all the Old West's stagecoach bandits? Stories—and none of them are more than that—abound: He may have moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and married a childhood sweetheart with whom he corresponded while in San Quentin; he may have kept more Wells Fargo money than he returned and lived a life of luxury in Mexico or New Orleans or perhaps St. Louis or New York City. One of Hume's operatives claimed that upon his release from San Quentin, Boles sailed for Japan and even provided the name of the steamship that took him there—the *Empress of China.*

One persistent and patently preposterous rumor, fomented by Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner,* had it that Boles resumed his career as road agent after his release from prison—there were apparently a few northern California robberies in the late 1880s that seemed to match his style—until Wells Fargo awarded him a two hundred dollar a month "pension" for agreeing to leave their vehicles alone.

A New York newspaper carried Boles's obituary in 1917, but the authenticity of this notice has never been ascertained.

In 1948, Hollywood provided the most fabulous of all theories on his career. The Universal film, *Black Bart,* starring Dan Duryea as Bart, had him a respectable rancher who robbed stagecoaches for the fun of destroying the Wells Fargo company. Additional spice was added by having Bart involved with the celebrated courtesan Lola Montez (played by Yvonne DeCarlo).

It is as valid a theory as any of the others.

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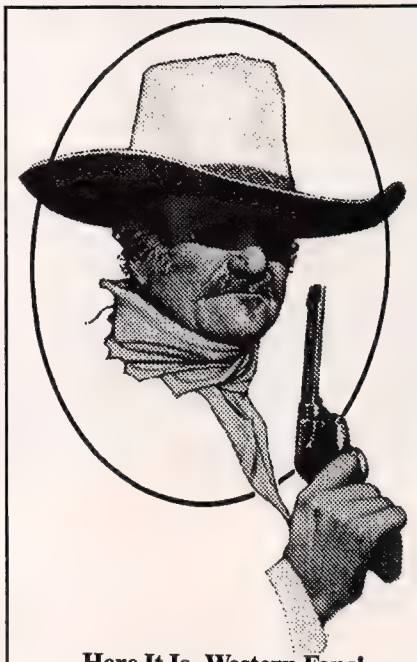

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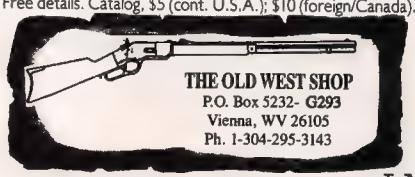

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LA

The Last Trace of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

The Story of Pompey's Pillar

BY HUGH McCORD

THE EXPEDITION, BEGUN OVER TWO YEARS BEFORE, had two months remaining when the crude dugout and its nine occupants pushed ashore. The Yellowstone, or the *Roche Jaune*, as French trappers called the river, ran languidly under the blistering July sun, and while Captain Clark was anxious to make his rendezvous at the headwaters of the Missouri, he and his party needed to stretch their legs. The Virginia-born captain, a tough frontiersman and Indian fighter, was particularly solicitous of the only woman with his group, the Indian guide he called Janey, and her child, whom she had carried on a cradleboard on her back these past seventeen months. He was a handsome, cheery little lad; Clark had spoiled him all the way to the Pacific and back and had nicknamed him Pomp.

Pompey's Pillar, outside Billings, Montana, was named after Sacajawea's son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, whose nickname was Pomp. (above) William Clark's inscription on Pompey's Pillar is the only remaining trace of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Just past a slight northward bend in the river the captain had spotted a curious landmark jutting up from the shimmering bottomlands in the near distance, a "remarkable rock," he would record in his journal, and one well worth seeing up close.

The twenty-eight-month epic journey of exploration known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition may be said to have begun in Paris on April 30, 1803, when President Thomas Jefferson's minister to

France, Robert Livingston, signed a document, shook hands with his French counterparts, and announced, "We have lived long, but this is the noblest work of our lives."

The paper, perhaps the most consequential in American history excepting only the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, called for the payment of fifteen million dollars in exchange for France's Louisiana Territory. This tract of over half a billion acres of wilderness doubled the size of the United States in the stroke of a pen. It comprised the lands between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains as far north as present-day Montana and North Dakota, and included the states-to-be of Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, plus most of Wyoming and Montana and portions of Minnesota, South Dakota, New Mexico, and Colorado.

Three months before the treaty was signed in Paris, President Jefferson, supremely confident of gaining the great and largely unexplored territory and electrified by its potential, sent a secret message to Congress in which he shared his plans to explore the lands west of the Mississippi "even to the western ocean." He asked for and received an appropriation of $2,500 to finance a military expedition to assert U.S. claims to the territory and to explore a route "across the continent for the purpose of commerce."

And just over a year from the signing, Meriwether Lewis, Jefferson's private secretary and a captain of infantry, and William Clark, a veteran artillery officer, launched their "Corps of Discovery" into the trackless lands of the Louisiana Purchase.

The expedition headed into the unknown from St. Louis on May 14, 1804, traveling up the Missouri River in a fifty-five-foot keelboat and two flat-bottomed canoes called pirogues. In addition to the coleaders, the party consisted of twenty-seven young, unmarried soldiers, a hunter-interpreter, and Clark's black slave, York. In the summer the exploring party, crawling up the river in the cloying heat and humidity at the rate of fifteen miles a day, reached modern-day Nebraska in the land of the greatest of the Plains tribes, the Lakota (Sioux). The expedition encountered no problems with the Indians until reaching the vicinity of what is today Pierre, South Dakota. There, in late September, a band of Teton Sioux, led by their chief Tortohonga, threatened Clark and attempted to seize one of the pirogues. Clark drew his sword and signaled his men to prepare for action. A swivel cannon was aimed at the Indians and for a moment time stood still. Then Tortohonga ordered his warriors away from the boat and the crisis passed.

President Jefferson received $2,500 to finance a military expedition to assert U.S. claims to the Louisiana Territory.

Now, with the first bite of cold in the air, the captains made plans to winter among the Mandan villages of the Upper Missouri. In mid-autumn they reached the mouth of the Knife River (near modern-day Washburn, North Dakota) and there constructed a triangular log stockade that they named Fort Mandan.

That winter temperatures fell to forty-five degrees below zero but the Corps of Discovery commanders made good use of their time. Hunting and woodcutting parties were sent out; boats, equipment, and clothing were mended; drawings and journal entries were made. Clark found a Mandan chief who claimed to know the lands to the west, and with the expedition interpreter, worked with the chief making tentative maps. Both Lewis and Clark met with delegations of Mandans, Minatarees (Hidatsas), and Arikaras who came in curiosity to the strange log fort on the Missouri to see the white men and to marvel over the black skin of Clark's trusted slave, York.

It was a Hidatsa who told Clark a significant story: that the Shoshone people of the Rocky Mountains had a great many horses and might be persuaded to trade for some that could be used as pack animals for the trip through the mountain passes.

And Lewis, that winter, hired a new crew member from a neighboring Minataree village, a Canadian trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau, who served as an interpreter. Into the bargain came Charbonneau's wife, a Shoshone girl named Sacajawea, who had been captured by the Minatarees at the age of eleven and who later had been sold to the Canadian or won by him in a gambling game. She was about fifteen years old, heavily pregnant, and anxious to travel upriver with the expedition, where she might rejoin her people.

On February 11, 1805, at Fort Mandan, Sacajawea had a long and agonizing labor. Lewis, whose medical skills were improving out of the necessary rigors of the trail,

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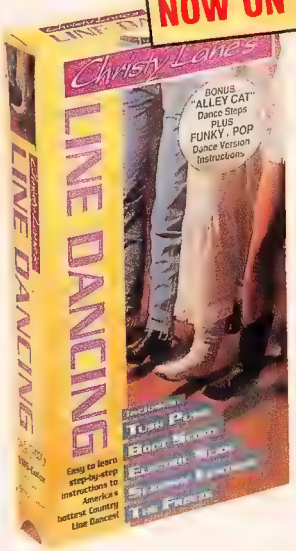

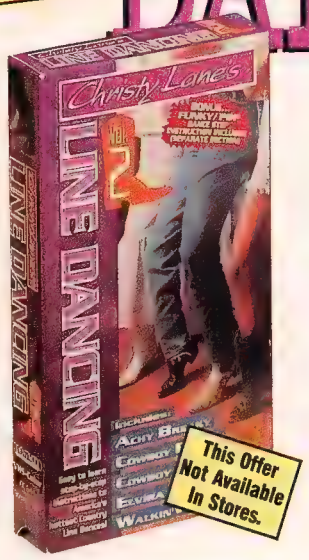

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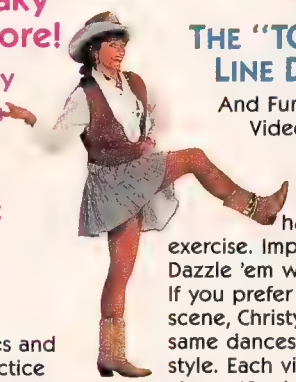

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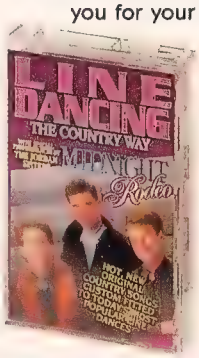

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found a trapper who advised that a dose of rattlesnake rattles would ease the girl's delivery. Lewis apparently had a rattler among his collected specimens (any snake would have been difficult to find in the winter), for he reported in his journal, "Having the rattle of a snake by me, I gave it to him and he administered two rings of it to the woman, broken in small pieces. I was informed that she had not taken it more than ten minutes before she brought forth."

Sacajawea gave birth to a boy who was named Jean Baptiste but Clark quickly nicknamed Pomp —said to be a Shoshone word meaning "firstborn."

The expedition departed Fort Mandan on April 7 to continue its journey up the Missouri. The thirty-one expedition members were distributed among six small canoes and two large pirogues. The lead "White Pirogue" carried Sacajawea and her son.

From the start, she not only earned her way but proved to be indispensable. She gathered wild artichokes, berries, and roots; provided invaluable information on the country of her people; and demonstrated a great presence of mind when, on May 14, one of the pirogues, with her husband at the helm, foundered in the river. Clark, who could not spell her name and later called her Janey, recorded that "the Indian woman to whom I ascribe equal fortitude and resolution . . . caught and preserved most of the light articles which were washed overboard."

Near the Great Falls of the Missouri, Sacajawea fell gravely ill and Lewis administered his special brand of trail medicine: medicinal barks, laudanum, and water from a sulphur spring. She recovered and resumed her work, carrying Jean Baptiste on her ever-present cradleboard. The grueling month-long portage around the Great Falls led the expedition into the high country and by July, as the Corps of Discovery neared the headwaters of the Missouri, she was so familiar with the landmarks of her Shoshone people—the "Lords of the Rocky Mountains"—that on July 28 she found the exact spot where, five years ago, she had been taken captive by the Minatarees.

SACAJAWEA WAS SO FAMILIAR WITH THE SHOSHONE LANDMARKS THAT SHE FOUND THE EXACT SPOT WHERE SHE HAD BEEN TAKEN CAPTIVE.

They pushed on toward a pass in the Bitterroot Mountains, crossed the Continental Divide into present-day Idaho, and on August 11, 1805, sighted their first Shoshone warrior, armed with bow and quiver of arrows and handsomely mounted on a saddleless horse. Lewis and his advance party had some tense moments among the Shoshone and their chief, Cameahwait, until Sacajawea arrived with Clark's rear guard. Then all changed to a joyous reunion: Sacajawea was Cameahwait's sister.

In their talks with Cameahwait, with Sacajawea translating, the two captains explained that they came in peace but that the Shoshone were now subject to American sovereignty. This declaration the chief seems to have taken in good spirits. He pledged his help, especially after learning that Sacajawea had decided to continue on westward with her husband and baby.

As they traveled on, down the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers, they encountered Nez Percé, Flathead, Skiloot, and other potentially hostile tribes. But Sacajawea's presence, as Clark wrote, "reconciles all the Indians as to our friendly intentions."

The Corps of Discovery reached the Pacific Coast on November 8, 1805, after a journey of more than four thousand miles. Seven miles inland from the "Great Western Ocian" (as Clark, who had only a nodding acquaintanceship with spelling, called it), they built a stockade—Fort Clatsop—named for a friendly Indian tribe of the area, and settled down for the winter.

The return journey began on March 23, 1806, and in a little over three months the Corps of Discovery reached the mouth of the Flathead (Bitterroot today) River at a point called Traveler's Rest. Here the commanders decided to split up. Lewis would explore north to the Marias River, Clark south along the Yellowstone, and the two parties would rendezvous at the juncture of the Yellowstone and Missouri, about two hundred miles west of their 1805 winter quarters at Fort Mandan.

On July 3, Lewis headed north toward the Marias River and Clark's party, which consisted of York, Charbonneau, Sacajawea and her eighteen-month-old son, eight men, and fifty horses. He marched up the Gallatin River toward the Yellowstone, reaching it (at a point near present-day Livingston, Montana) on July 15. Surveying the sparse timber and treacherous roil of the river at that point, Clark determined to follow the waterway until he could supervise the building of boats to carry them to the rendezvous with Lewis.

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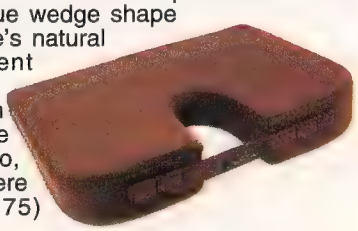

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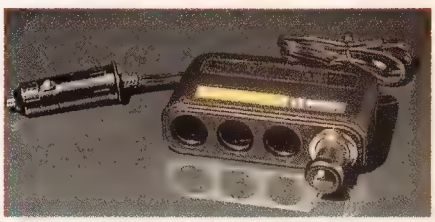

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On the twentieth, some days before half of their horse herd was run off by a band of Crow Indians and at a point just below the future city of Billings, Clark's men located the trees they needed. They built two dugouts eighteen feet long and sixteen inches deep, and lashed the two boats together. Clark, York, the Charbonneaus, and four or five of the men boarded the crude raftlike vessel, and the others drove the remaining horses along the river toward the rendezvous point.

The dugouts meandered down the Yellowstone and on the twenty-fifth Clark spotted a flat-topped butte—"a remarkable rock"—jutting out of the bottomlands.

They all went ashore to see the remarkable rock, Sacajawea with Jean Baptiste on her back. Captain Clark measured its circumference at four hundred paces and estimated its height at two hundred feet. The grayish, gritty sandstone seemed to afford no opportunity for climbing, but on the northeast face of the bulwark, where a gully broke the uniform steepness, a way was found to the summit. Clark, with some of the others—perhaps even with the ever-curious Sacajawea, her boy strapped tightly to her—climbed to the top and saw the Rocky Mountains to the southwest, the mountains later to be named the Little Wolf and the Bull, and, just below the rim, the petroglyphs carved there by Indians in the unknown past.

On the way down, Clark found more animal figures carved on the rock face and found a clear space for his own inscription. He carved into the soft sandstone:

Wm. Clark
July 25, 1806

and wrote in his journal, "This rock . . . I shall call Pompey's Tower."

WILLIAM CLARK HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH SACAJAWEA AND REPEATEDLY OFFERED TO RAISE AND EDUCATE HER SON, JEAN BAPTISTE.

Nine days later, Clark's party reached the juncture of the Yellowstone and Missouri and set up camp. On August 12, Lewis's party arrived. At the Mandan village where they had first met, Lewis and Clark said good-bye to Charbonneau, Sacajawea, and little Pomp.

On September 23, the Corps of Discovery reached St. Louis, completing one of the most momentous explorations in history. Lewis hurried off a letter to his benefactor, President Jefferson: "In obedience to your orders we have penetrated the continent of North America to the Pacific Ocean. . . ."

William Clark had fallen in love with Jean Baptiste and his mother in the course of their journey together, and over the years that followed their return repeatedly offered to raise and educate the "butifull promising child." Not long after Meriwether Lewis's tragic and unexplained death in the Natchez Trace in October 1809, Charbonneau, Sacajawea, and their son—"Pomp," or "Pompey," as Clark continued to call him—came to St. Louis to visit Clark and stayed nearly a year. They returned to the Knife River country and the Minataree village they called home, but Clark had apparently used their time together to make a strong argument for Jean Baptiste's education: the Charbonneaus left the boy behind in Clark's care.

He was educated in St. Louis and is said to have learned French and English, classic literature, history, mathematics, and science. In 1823, some time after Pomp had returned to his family, Prince Paul of Württemburg came wandering up the Missouri, met Charbonneau and his wife, and persuaded them to let him take Jean Baptiste to Europe. There young Charbonneau stayed six years as a member of the royal household, receiving classical education and becoming a capable linguist.

He returned to the Missouri River in 1829, worked as a trapper in Idaho and Utah, traveled with such mountain man legends as Jim Bridger, Jim Beckwourth, and Joe Meek, and worked as a guide from Santa Fe to San Diego during the war with Mexico in 1846. He served briefly as *alcalde* (mayor) of Mission San Luís Rey in California and spent many years in the goldfields of the American River country around Sacramento. He was remembered as an intrepid mountain man, dependable guide, and charming "man of two worlds," comfortable among Indians and whites alike.

He died, probably of pneumonia, in Oregon in 1866.

Sacajawea probably died on December 20, 1812, at Fort Manuel on the Upper Missouri River. On that date, John C. Luttig, a clerk for Manuel Lisa's fur trading post, wrote in his daily log, "This evening the wife of Charbonneau, a Snake [Shoshone] squaw, died of a putrid fever. She was the best woman in the fort, aged about

twenty-five years. She left a fine infant child."

Here lies a mystery. William Clark did not believe this "Snake squaw" to be Sacajawea but another Shoshone woman Charbonneau had married and that the "fine infant child" referred to a girl named Lizette who was born of that union and was not Sacajawea's daughter.

Shoshone legend has Sacajawea living a long life and dying in honored old age on the Shoshone reservation at Wind River, Wyoming, in 1884.

Whatever the case, in Portland, Oregon, in 1905, the centennial year of her joining the Lewis and Clark expedition, a magnificent statue of Sacajawea was unveiled. The sculpture depicts a beautiful girl in buckskins, her outstretched arm pointing the way, her baby—Jean Baptiste, baby Pomp—serene in his cradleboard on her back.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition set out from St. Louis for the uncharted wilderness of the West in May 1804.

TO VISIT POMPEY'S PILLAR

Pompey's Pillar lies twenty-eight miles northeast of Billings, Montana, off Interstate 94. William Clark named it "Pompey's Tower," but for some unrecorded reason, the landmark was renamed "Pompey's Pillar," perhaps in some vague association with the Pompey's Pillar in ancient Egypt.

A railed wooden walkway leads the visitor to a landing, about halfway to the top, near which is located Clark's inscription on the rock, protected by a thick screen of lucite but clearly readable. *It is the only remaining trace of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.*

The walkway may be taken to the summit for a stunning panoramic view of the Yellowstone River valley.

Pompey's Pillar is a well-kept National Historic Landmark managed by the Bureau of Land Management of Billings.

SUGGESTED READING

Bakeless, John. *Lewis and Clark: Partners in Discovery.* New York: William Morrow, 1947.

Lavender, David. *The Way to the Western Sea: Lewis and Clark Across the Continent.* New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Snyder, Gerald S. *In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1970.

ILLUSTRATION BY EMELINE HASTINGS

A CONVERSATION WITH

Terry Johnston

"This guy is special—wait and see. Unless he's a one-book author, in a few years he'll be on top of the mountain. That book knocked me out."

I wish I could remember who whispered this to me, but I know it was said during the Spur Awards banquet at the Western Writers of America convention in Amarillo, Texas, in June 1983, and it was said when Terry C. Johnston, accompanied by his six-year-old son Joshua, was threading his way toward the front of the packed room to accept WWA's Medicine Pipe Award for his first novel, *Carry the Wind*.

Whoever said it knew what he was talking about. *Carry the Wind* knocked out everybody who read it—*Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and newspapers from coast to coast gave it rave reviews. And when Johnston followed it with the sequels *BorderLords* (1985) and *One-Eyed Dream* (1988), he had not only killed any idea that he might be a one-book sensation, he was halfway to the top of the mountain.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM OLTERSDORF

BY
DALE
L.
WALKER

JOHNSTON'S NOVELS ARE CHOCK-A-BLOCK WITH HISTORY AND LORE, AND BECAUSE OF IT, HE MANAGES TO TEACH WHILE HE ENTERTAINS.

Just a few books later, he was on the summit. Johnston is a genuine nonpareil in western fiction—there is no writer, past or present, to compare him to. He is a bestselling author in a field that produces few of them. He is an unpretentious but strikingly "western" author who insists he is not a novelist but a storyteller. He is a writer who has "walked the walk"—he has crossed the Continental Divide fourteen times *in the winter,* twice on horseback, twelve times on snowshoes, and has trod the ground or ridden the river of every dim trail, Indian village, trapper's hideaway, trading post, soldier's camp, battlefield, fort, nook, and cranny described in his books. And he is an author who has never written a short book—one who, indeed, often needs at least three volumes to tell a story—yet whose growing legion of readers is so faithful that even with his naturally prolific work ethic (nineteen fat novels in thirteen years), he is hard-pressed to keep pace with his audience's demands.

And among his other unique qualities, one which teachers of fiction warn their students to avoid, Johnston's novels are chock-a-block with history and lore, and because of it, he manages what few novelists even attempt: to teach while he entertains.

He was born in Arkansas City, Kansas, on New Year's Day, in 1947. His father was an educator and president of Cochise College in Douglas, Arizona; his mother was a teacher of journalism and English. Terry attended high school in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and at Central Oklahoma State University in Edmund, where he was class president, Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society member, and consistently on the dean's list, he earned a bachelor's degree in American history in 1970.

In college, Johnston was inspired by reading Bernard DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri* to delve deeply into the history of the American and Canadian fur trade era—the era of the mountain man—and soon was also immersed in books on the Indian wars, the frontier army, and the Plains Indians.

As was expected in a family of educators, Johnston's first career was as a teacher of social studies, but the writer juices in him had continued to ferment since the time in his preteens when he tried to write a novel (his parents learned of it when they received the bill for his subscription to *Writer's Digest),* and since the 1960s, when he wrote articles for historical journals.

In 1973 he began work on what would become his first novel, *Carry the Wind.* The book grew in direct ratio to Johnston's enthusiasm for his characters and story until he had 1,200 pages of manuscript and only a vague idea about the long trail toward publication—longer and in many ways more arduous than any journey across the Continental Divide. The book was finished in 1977 and, after being rejected by twenty-nine publishers, was issued by a small Aurora, Illinois, company—Caroline House—in a beautifully jacketed, 572-page edition, in 1982.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Johnston's astonishing output includes the aforementioned trilogy that began with *Carry the Wind,* the Custer Son of the Plains trilogy: *Long Winter Gone* (1990), *Seize the Sky* (1991), and *Whisper of the Wolf* (1991); the Jonah Hook trilogy: *Cry of the Hawk* (1992), *Winter Rain* (1993), and *Dream Catcher* (1994); and The Plainsman series of novels on the Western Indians Wars: *Sioux Dawn* (1990), *Red Cloud's Revenge* (1990), *The Stalkers* (1990), *Black Sun* (1991), *Devil's Backbone* (1991), *Shadow Riders* (1991), *Dying Thunder* (1992), *Blood Song* (1993), *Reap the Whirlwind* (1994), and most recently, *Trumpet on the Land* (1995).

Johnston and his wife Vanette live in a three-bedroom home on the northern high plains, "up and out of Billings." He is an early riser who makes a pot of coffee and heads downstairs to his office to begin an average six-hour writing stint, five or six days each week. He breaks at breakfast to help get his two younger children, Noah and Erinn, ready for school, and again at noon when he and Vanette take a five-mile walk.

In the summer and early autumn he is most often on the road, at book signings and promotions organized by his publisher, Bantam Books, and on tours, taking city folk to Indian War battlefields. What time he can spare between such events, on airplanes, during airport layovers, or in motel rooms, he reads, outlines, plots, makes notes, and prepares for resuming work on a book or in making plans for a new one.

"During the days we are back

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"I READ EVERYTHING ABOUT MOUNTAIN MEN I COULD LAY MY HANDS ON, AND OUT OF ALL THIS A CHARACTER CAME TO ME, FULLY FLESHED OUT."

in Billings," he says, "we try to cram in our own family vacations, camping trips, movies, swimming down at the state lake our house overlooks, tending the garden out back, or just sitting outside to watch the stars wink into view come twilight."

LLWM: The last time we met, in Jackson Hole, I thought you looked exactly like a young Captain Jack Crawford, one of my heroes and the most western-*looking* writer who ever lived. Does appearance, and being on the road so much, help sell books?

TCJ: I appreciate the comparison. By the way, Jack Crawford, the "Poet of the Plains," figures prominently in my *Cold Day in Hell,* the eleventh book in the Plainsman series. He was quite a character—and so, I guess, am I. Funny thing is, there are some who say I dress and look the way I do for effect. All I've got to say is that anybody who truly knows me knows this is who I am. I hate posturing and pretense. I give my readers more credit than my critics do. Out here in the real world, folks can spot a phony a mile off—and they'll steer clear of him.

LLWM: It took you five years to find a publisher for *Carry the Wind,* yet it and its sequels continue in print and sell in very big numbers. What's the story behind that first novel?

TCJ: How far back can I go? In the movies and TV shows I watched growing up in the 1950s, there was this character guiding the wagon train or an army patrol, an old boy in greasy buckskins who knew enough sign language to talk with various "hostile" tribes, knew where the mountain passes and water holes could be found. I wondered about those fellas and how they knew so damned much about surviving out in the unforgiving wilderness. In college I read DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri* and bam!—I had my questions answered. Those were *mountain men,* and in their heads they had the maps.

LLWM: That was your introduction to the old fur trappers up on the Missouri?

TCJ: Oh, yes, and I had to know more about them. I read everything I could lay my hands on—journals and diaries on the fur trade. I became a fixture in rare books rooms in college libraries and bookstores, and even wrote an article or two for obscure publications on these old trappers. Out of all this, after a half dozen years of reading, a character came to me, fully fleshed out. One night in the summer of 1973 I was camped in the Medicine Bow Mountains in southern Wyoming and this character talked to me in a dream. Together we sat in the shade of a blanket bower next to a stream. The details were so astounding, so real, that I expected to find this cantankerous but lovable character there the next morning as I tore out of my sleeping bag, pushed aside the tent flap, and stood there to greet the morning sun. But he was nowhere to be found and I put the whole thing out of my mind—a foolish dream.

* * *

LLWM: Was he Titus Bass?

TCJ: Yep, Ol' Scratch himself, and he wouldn't be denied. He returned time and again in my dreams and I'm sure grateful for his persistence because that autumn of 1973, over twenty-one years ago now, I began to write down in longhand some of his adventures. By the next fall I was pushing sheets of paper through the little portable typewriter I had crammed into a laundry room in this tiny duplex where I was living with my first wife. I was working full-time then. In my supremely blissful ignorance of the writer's craft, what I thought would be one story got out of hand and turned out to be three. But I got the first one done, made some copies of that raw, sprawling manuscript, and began letting it leak out.

LLWM: What did you hear about it?

TCJ: Well, some people began telling me the story was "every bit as good as some of that stuff out there"—you know, those left-handed compliments that can get a person in real big trouble egowise. I've grown a lot thicker skin since then, but those twenty-nine rejections of *Carry the Wind* hurt me terribly. I did have some publishers who wanted me to change the story. One wanted something more occult—Stephen King was coming on strong in those days—and one suggested that I put in a crazed grizzly bear (*Jaws* was a big hit back then). A few editors wanted me to change Scratch into

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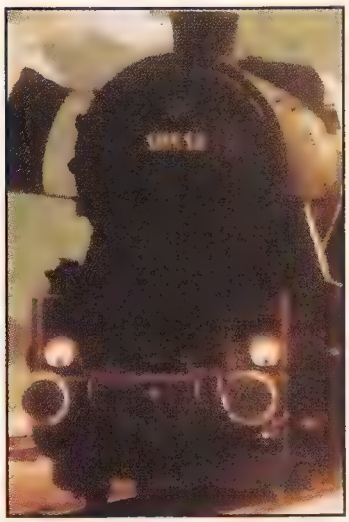

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a female, a mountain woman, to appeal to a growing segment of the book-buying audience and perhaps presaging our era of political correctness.

LLWM: You could call it a novel experience.

TCJ: No kidding, and it's been an experience over the years to run into two or three of those editors who turned that book down. But at the time, all I could do was wait and feed my family by selling cars. Then a friend put me on to Jameson Campaigne of Caroline House, a small publisher outside Chicago. He read it, called me to say he wanted to publish it, and after I worked with Pete Decker, an award-winning novelist and former editor at Little, Brown . . . well, in the summer of 1982 I held that first novel in my hands. The only thrill bigger for me had been the birth of my first child, Joshua. I'm not ashamed to tell you I wept that summer day in 1982.

LLWM: From *Carry the Wind* to your newest novel, *Trumpet on the Land,* your books are loaded with what I call *lore*—fascinating, genuinely educational historical stuff about the lay of the land, how the mountain man lived, the army in the West, Indian folkways and life. Is this an outgrowth of your teaching career?

TCJ: I seem always to have been interested in history and even my brief stint as a teacher—in no way could it be called a career—was an outgrowth of that captivation. I came from a family of teachers—father, mother, a brother, and two sisters—and I think my teacher-family thought it was a bit unseemly for me to aspire to be a writer; for many years they wanted to know when I was going to put this writing thing aside and find myself an honest day job. My family has made peace with the fact that I'm a writer, and what I like to say is that while I'm not teaching thirty students at a time in a classroom, I can teach hundreds of thousands at a time with my novels.

LLWM: You are a child of the West; what was it like growing up in the West in the 1950s?

TCJ: It was a wonderfully innocent time—the very best time, I think, of this century. Before my folks bought our first television, I was reading Zane Grey, listening to Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, and the Lone Ranger on radio. Then I began taking in movie matinees, wearing my coonskin cap and watching Davy Crockett in front of that fuzzy, black-and-white TV glow every Sunday evening, packing along my Red Ryder BB gun on my trusty old bicycle and exploring the deserts of southern Arizona. I mowed grass for extra money and even remember the first book I bought with my own money: a Bantam edition of Will Henry's *No Survivors.* God, how I loved Will Henry! I collected his books and those he wrote as Clay Fisher—*The Brass Command, The Tall Men, Niño.* I fell in love with all the bigger-than-life characters of that bygone time and with the concept of something much, much bigger than any of them, or us: the concept of *frontier.* I think I wanted to know more about it, and wanted to write about it, even in those innocent days.

LLWM: Speaking of the late Will Henry: I know we share a great admiration for him as a man and as the finest historical novelist of the West of all time. He insisted that once history is introduced and used in fiction, an author must remain faithful to the historical record. Do you abide by that premise?

TCJ: Will's novels influenced me in my formative years and my brief association with him from 1985 until his death in October 1991 is something that has stayed by me every time I sit down to write. Getting to know "Narrow Eye" personally in those last years of his life has had the greatest effect on me. What we shared in common from the start was this matter of fidelity to history. It's sad that so few writers today adhere to Will's maxim of abiding faithfulness to history. Instead, for too many novelists, history is nothing more than a backdrop for their story: they glean from the bones of history what they want, then run fast and loose with it. When you do that with the *spirit* of history, you shortchange the reader, and that is what sticks in my craw.

LLWM: But it's not easy for a novelist to hew to the historical record?

TCJ: I believe if a writer wants to take on the difficult task of cre-

"THE TRILOGY IS WELL-SUITED FOR ME FOR IT IS A MOST SATISFYING WAY OF TELLING A HUGE, SPRAWLING, RUGGED STORY OF ADVENTURE."

ating a historical novel, then he's cut off a big chew and needs to know what is expected of him. The word *historical* in "historical novel" is supposed to have meaning. To answer your question, history has never gotten in the way of my telling a story. I do not have to stop at an agreed upon set of objective facts, but can go beyond the dull and often forgettable recitation of history, and while never altering known history, can make it a living, breathing experience by making my characters breathe, have hearts that beat, have fears and passions and flaws and essential goodness—everything readers have in their own lives.

LLWM: I remember Will Henry admired what you were doing.

TCJ: I'll tell you, Dale, the one thing I prize above everything that has been written about me and my books is this from Will Henry: "He is the genuine article when it comes to storytelling, but you can also depend upon his having done his historical homework. . . . I admire his power and invention as a writer, but I admire his love and faith in history just as much."

LLWM: Your second trilogy, the Son of the Plains novels, was about George Armstrong Custer. After all your research and writing on Custer, what is your evaluation of him?

TCJ: I began reading about him in college and thought I had a pretty good handle on him. I should have known better. I had learned nothing more than the mythology—the Hollywood version. The more I read, the more I came to realize I had to be wary of the political agendas fostered by certain writers—that he was a demigod, national hero, military genius, raving lunatic, self-serving promoter, and egotistical maniac who led 260 men to their death at the Greasy Grass. Very few writers sought any depth, but used him as a symbol for whatever political hay they were forking. My vision of Custer is of a very mortal man, subject to all the passions, fears, uncertainties, ego faults, and temptations that we all fall prey to—in brief, a very *human* Custer. He was a big man in an era of big men, a genuine national hero comparable to our astronauts today.

LLWM: Are you convinced he had an affair with and a child by Monaseetah, the captive Cheyenne girl he met after the Washita battle?

TCJ: Yes, I remain convinced that he did carry on a winter long affair with Monaseetah, and like the eminent historian Robert Utley, I believe there is too much circumstantial evidence pointing to it to dismiss it. Custer's fellow officers wrote of the woman's existence; as well, one has only to understand the nineteenth century mores of a "man gone off to war" to realize it was common practice for a soldier to have such a dalliance. The real clinchers are the Sioux and Cheyenne oral legends revolving around Monaseetah and her second-born child, Yellow Bird. If there was but a solitary account, I would likely discount the story, but we have several accounts of the woman's existence, of her "left-hand" relationship with Custer, and of the birth of their half-breed son.

LLWM: You seem to write in trilogies. Have you found that it takes more than one big book to tell a big story?

TCJ: Three is a magical number, at least for me. The trilogy is a form well-suited for me for it is a most satisfying way of telling a huge, sprawling, rugged story of adventure. To take one recent example—I could never have compressed into one book the Jonah Hook saga that I finished last fall with *Dream Catcher*. One book was just not enough to fully explore that character's exhaustingly physical and excruciatingly emotional journey. But even so, I'm proud of the fact that any of my novels, whether part of a trilogy or a longer series, can stand alone.

LLWM: Is it true you will revive Titus Bass in some future novels?

TCJ: The last line in *One-Eyed Dream,* third book in the original series, when Titus is leaving Josiah Paddock behind in Taos, is, "This ain't the last you've heard of Titus Bass!" It was a very blatant way of telling my readers that Scratch would be back one day. This past summer I completed the first of what will be another six adventures for Titus, to be released in hardcover by Bantam in November 1995. I wanted to go back in time with Titus and flesh

out some of the early adventures he alludes to in *Carry the Wind*—his early days in Kentucky, his time on the great rivers of the East, his first journey to the Rocky Mountains. After that, I'll pick up the thread of his story after he leaves Taos in 1834 and cover the decline of the fur trade, the coming of the buffalo robe trade, the arrival of the dragoons on the plains, the migration along the Oregon Trail—and the coming of the Indian Wars.

LOOK FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF

LOUIS L'AMOUR WESTERN MAGAZINE

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LLWM: Your Plainsman novels on the Indian Wars of the West, from the Fetterman fight to Wounded Knee, are a very ambitious project. There are ten novels in that series thus far, with *Trumpet on the Land,* about the aftermath of the Custer disaster, the most recent. What is yet to come?

TCJ: I've gotten more novels blocked out and, depending on how each new one develops, I ought to have a book out every February for the next decade. The one I just finished, *A Cold Day in Hell,* is concerned with Ranald S. Mackenzie's attack on the Northern Cheyenne village of Dull Knife on the Red Fork of the Powder River. My Irish sergeant, Seamus Donegan, who is the thread tying all these books and battles together, will be there through the end of the Sioux wars, the Nez Perce campaign, the Apache wars in the Southwest, on down to Wounded Knee.

LLWM: You are only forty-seven and have had a spectacular career already. Is it true that you are "booked up" through the year 2001? What's ahead for you?

TCJ: Well, I sure don't ever plan to retire. I'm contracted with books on the return of Titus Bass until 2001. The ten remaining books in the Plainsman series will take me up to 2005. After that I have a file folder and a bulletin board stretching across one of my office walls, both of which are filled with scraps of paper on story ideas, book subjects, series concepts, and the like. I'm going to keep busy.

LLWM: How do you find time for these "Terry Johnston's West" tours?

* * *

TCJ: I just make the time—I draw a lot of energy from them. "Terry Johnston's West" is a week in the summer when folks from all corners of the country spend time with me walking the Indian Wars battle sites. For HistoryAmerica, a Dallas agency, I developed another battlegrounds tour, which will end around Bill Cody's grave on Lookout Mountain, outside Denver. The Delta Queen folks want me as a guide for a week's cruise on the Mississippi in 1996, and I am putting together a Titus Bass tour where we will visit the old fur trade historic sites.

LLWM: And now Terry Johnston on audiotapes. Tell us about that development.

TCJ: A couple of years ago Audio Renaissance in Los Angeles brought out *The Stalkers,* my Beecher Island battle story, on a three-hour tape with me reading—man, was that ever scary! It was complete with sound effects and great background music. Last July, Dove Audio released *Sioux Dawn,* not just a reading but actually *performed* by Ed Asner. This was the Fetterman Massacre story and Asner did it with all the voices, moods, and personas—a marvelous job. Dove has two more of the Plainsman titles contracted; Time Warner AudioBooks has released two more of my books—*Carry the Wind* and *Dream Catcher*—and they plan on producing the rest of the Jonah Hook and Titus Bass trilogies.

LLWM: How is it all going to end?

TCJ: I can't even think about it, other than to say that I know what I want on my gravestone:

Terry C. Johnston
(1947—)
He Told a Damned Good Story

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Crown Royal
Tossed out of the best bars everywhere.

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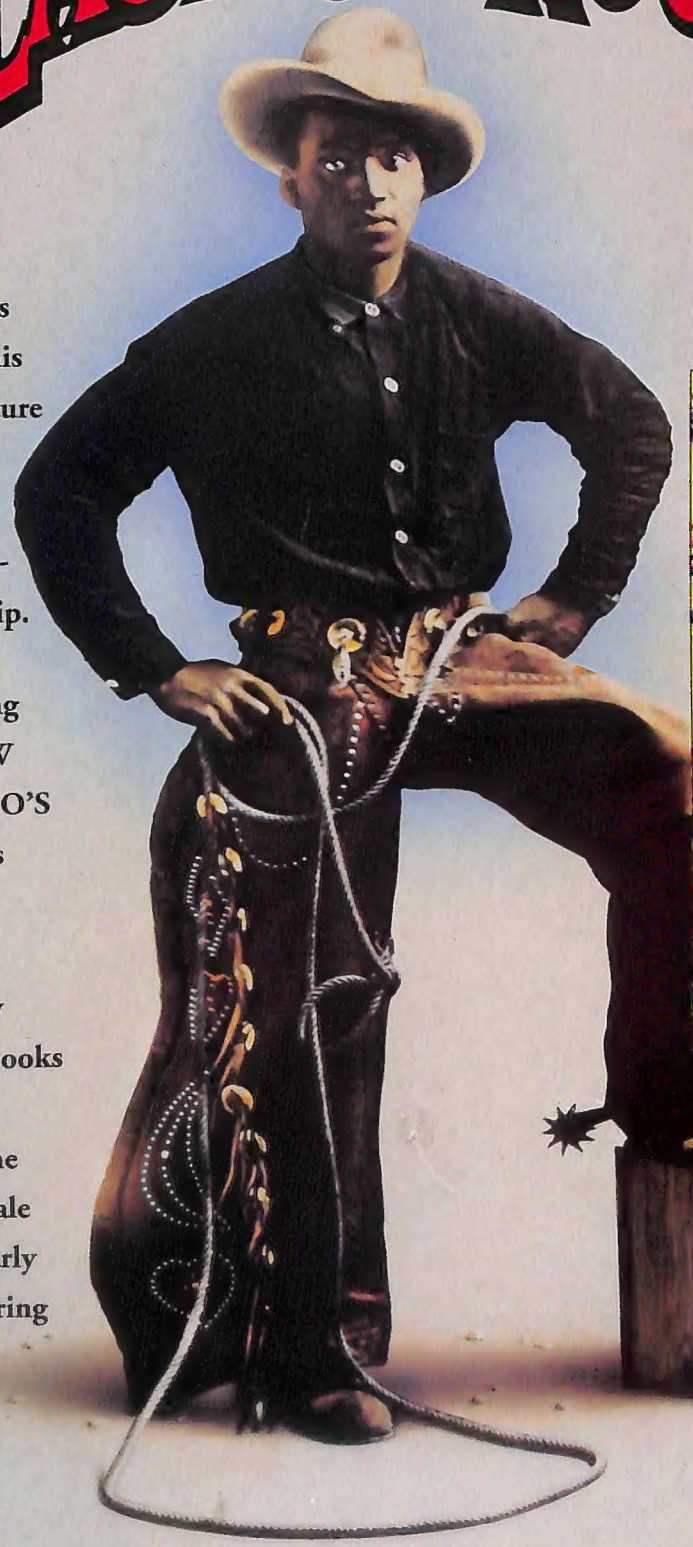
LAST GO ROUND



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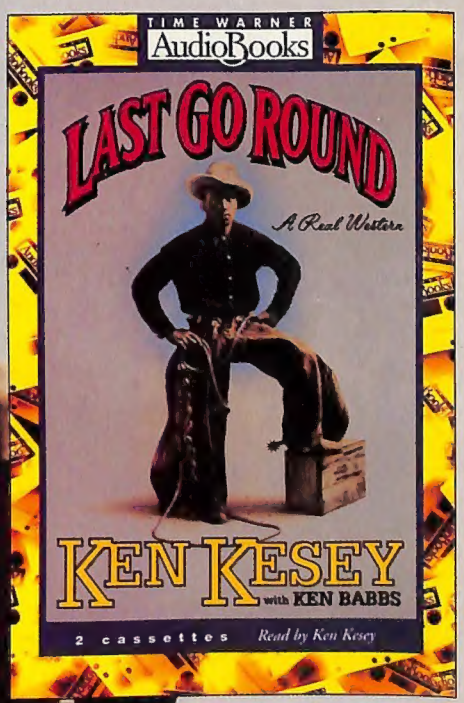

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